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MARCH, 1975

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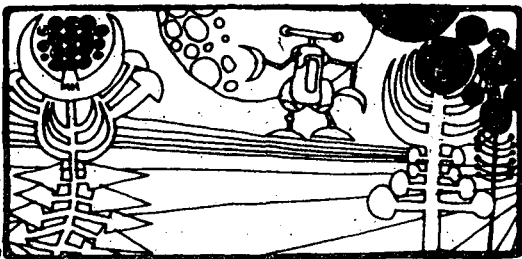
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Amazing Science Fiction Stories

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**TED
WHITE**

EDITORIAL



HUGOS THERE? The World Science Fiction Convention has faded again into the mists of time, a mammoth five-day, non-stop party in which the stf community comes together (like a gathering of the tribes) to celebrate anew its existence and warps time so that five days becomes—somehow—a month of Sundays, a time out of time, unique unto itself.

Shortly after this one—the Discon 2—was over, I wrote a brief report on the convention for last month's *FANTASTIC*, so I shall not attempt to recap that report here. Likewise, you may refer to that issue for a list of this year's Hugo winners, which will not be repeated here. However, two of the awards do call for comment here.

The first, and the one for which I am most pleased, is the Hugo Award for Best Fan Writer, which went to our *Clubhouse* columnist, Susan Wood (formerly Susan Wood Glicksohn). In some respects the award to Susan this year marks a neat circle, non-ironical, but curiously appropriate.

In 1967 when I was myself co-chairman (with Dave Van Arnam) of the World SF Convention, there was only one “fan” Hugo—that for best fanzine (fan-produced magazine)—although the professional Hugos covered the entire range of activity from drama to art to writing and editing. We resolved to change that,

by the introduction of two new fan categories—Best Fan Writer and Best Fan Artist.

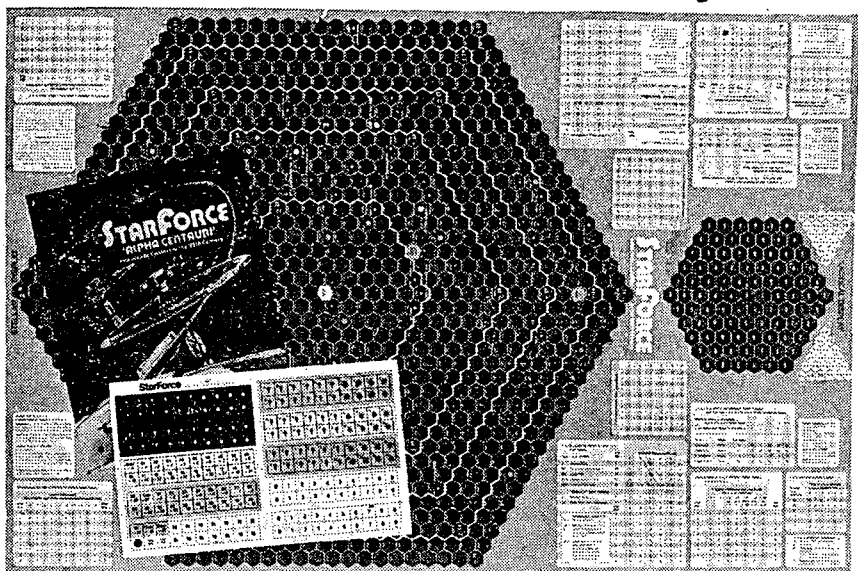
Unfortunately, the “rules” under which Worldcons then operated (loosely legislated, freely interpreted by each Worldcon committee) did not allow the introduction of two new Hugo categories. (They don't allow this year's “Special Hugo” to Chesley Bonestell, either. Oh well.) We decided to get around this prohibition via a diversionary tactic. We announced that we would be awarding *two* sets of awards that year: the Science Fiction Achievement Awards and the Fan Achievement Awards. In fact the Hugos were always officially SF Achievement Awards, the “Hugo” being only their “popular” name. We proposed to go on calling the professional awards Hugos, and to name the fan awards the *Pongs*—after legendary 1930's fan Hoy Ping Pong, who by no coincidence at all was the alter ego of our Fan Guest of Honor, Bob (Wilson) Tucker, the man who introduced a sense of humor into stf fandom.

Serious, dedicated fans who saw themselves in serious contention for one of our fan awards and envisioned themselves accepting such an award before an audience of hundreds (if not thousands) of their peers, and could see such an award occupying a place of honor forever after on their

(cont. on page 120)

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Gordon Eklund (whose last appearance in these pages was "Moby, Too", December, 1973) tells a curious tale—about a robot with no soul, a dog named Malachi, and their attempt to breathe new life into the story of Frankenstein with a—

SECOND CREATION

GORDON EKLUND

I.

ONCE AGAIN the robot T39 came down into the Cavern of Man. As he rolled carefully down the sloping concrete ramp which led to the vault itself, it was his one and only wish that this visit would be his last, that he would never have to venture down here again. For a robot of his time, T39 was an advanced and mature creature, largely free of ancient and petty superstitions, but whenever he dared intrude into this vast and sacred place, he felt a fear so strong that it threatened to consume his very self. The sheer size and breadth of the cavern, the immense distances between roof and floor, the darkness that hugged so tightly to the myriad corners, and above all the close proximity of man himself—if only dead men—inspired a fear within T39 that he found impossible to subdue for very long. In fact, often in the past—especially during the tentative phases of his experiment—he had failed to con-

trol this fear and had turned and run long before reaching his intended destination—the vault—his feet changed into wheels that whirled like madly spinning stars, fleeing at a speed just short of sound, racing inexorably upward toward the bright distant surface that lay above. But not this time. T39 was adamant; this excursion must be the last. If he was able to obtain the one last part needed for the completion of his work, then there would be no further reason to descend again into this awful cavern. This thought alone inspired the robot. He moved a little more quickly, his courage boosted. He continued his careful way down the ramp.

Then, too, there was Malachi. Malachi was a dog, who padded lightly at the robot's side, a torch clasped firmly between his jaws. Without Malachi, T39 knew he would never have come this far. The dog claimed immortality; everyone admitted that he was at the least incredibly ancient.

illustrated by RICHARD OLSEN



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Malachi showed no outward signs of his age. Nor was he afraid of the cavern. Often, at T39's urging, Malachi had come here alone during the past months to inspect the vault and to study the men closely. Also, unlike any robot, Malachi understood the common language of man; he could both read it and speak it. Malachi claimed to have actually lived during those forgotten times when men still walked the face of the earth, but even T39 doubted this part. He did know that the dog was brave, and that for now was quite sufficient. Truth could come later on.

Now they reached the end of the ramp. Ahead, the floor was thickly strewn with rubble—stones and pebbles that had fallen from the roof; bits and pieces of wood chipped from the various walls and doors. Passage here was awkward. Withdrawing his normally cubical feet, T39 substituted a pair of flat webbed feet. He said, "Come," and moved delicately across the floor; the dog obediently followed. This room—the deepest part of the cavern—was nearly fifty yards across. T39 had covered almost the whole distance when he stopped.

Directly ahead, against the far wall, was an open wooden door. Past this door was the vault. And within the vault, the men he sought.

T39 took the torch from the dog's mouth and held it high, let-

ting a narrow stream of light creep past the open door. "You are certain you will know the correct box?"

"It is clear enough. If any is undamaged, it will be this one. The girl is young. She has lain here fifty years fewer than the others." The dog's speech was almost as exact as the robot's; their language was a simple one, easily spoken.

"Then we may go," said T39.

"Of course—come." The dog went first. T39 held the torch so that it brightly illuminated them both. The dog passed through the open door and T39 followed, contracting his head carefully so that he could enter. Now they were inside the vault.

It was a small room filled with long boxes made from lead or another heavy metal. The boxes were stacked neatly throughout the room, as many as a half-dozen piled one atop another. A few had been disturbed and sat alone; some of these were open. Malachi passed easily between the stacks. T39 went with him, carefully trying to avoid any direct physical contact with the boxes.

"Shine the light toward this one." With his snout, Malachi indicated a particular box.

"Here." T39 moved the torch.

"It is the one," Malachi said.

"This one? Third from the bottom?" His hands were changing already. Offsetting pinchers appeared—the claws of a steel crustaceon. "You are certain?"

"Stop asking me that," Malachi said. "If you don't believe me, then I suggest you come here yourself. It would be easier that way, for you could move the coffins and inspect their contents. I have to make do with the written records. But this is the one. I marked it last night."

"He is fifty years younger," T39 said. "But what are fifty years after thousands of centuries? Can we be sure this one is the best?"

"The only way to be sure of anything would be to inspect them all, try them all." He wagged his tail at the piled boxes—a hundred or more. "Shall we?"

"No," T39 said, hastily. He moved his hands and clasped the uppermost box between the pinchers. Carefully, he lifted the box and carried it to an open space, where he set it down. Returning for the next box, he said, "I could never come here again."

"That's what I thought," said Malachi.

When the box he sought lay at the top of the pile, T39 again changed hands. The pinchers disappeared, replaced by two wedge-like appendages. T39 inserted these beneath the lid of the box and pulled upward. There was a pop—then a fragrant odor, like spilled perfume. Changing hands once more, T39 removed the lid.

The dog picked the torch off the floor, passed it to the robot, who peered deeply into the box. "No," he said, waving the light.

"The head is fine but . . . this one is not right. Malachi, you are mistaken. No." Sadly, he moved to replace the lid, thinking that he would, after all, be forced to come here again.

"Wait!" Malachi cried. "Now what's wrong with you?"

"Look for yourself. Can't you see? He is too small—so tiny and frail—fragile. The others were twice his size. Our man is a giant compared to this."

"That's because I chose them that way. I went through the records and found the biggest and heaviest, but we don't need size this time. And she's a woman—a girl; they're supposed to be small. Do you know what a woman is?"

"The opposite of a man," T39 said, with conviction. "A different sex."

"And what does that mean? No—don't try to tell me. You don't have the slightest idea. Women are smaller than men, but they're equal in intelligence—often more so. When she came here—when she was put in the box—she was only fifteen. That's why she's so small, but it's also why she's survived so well. We can use her—we may have to use her."

"All right," T39 said, pretending to understand. Once more he gazed deeply into the big leaden box. "Did you say fifteen?"

"It says so in the records."

"Fifteen years?"

"Of course, fifteen years," Malachi said. "Do we have to go

through this again?"

"No, that will not be necessary," T39 said, with dignity. But he was greatly disturbed nonetheless. He always was when the question of man's brief lifespan arose. It seemed almost embarrassing in its vast absurdity that a race so glorious as mankind should have been doomed to a physical existence so brief as to seem but a flicker in time to him—a child of man—a mere robot. Of course, man could live forever past the moment of physical death—since he possessed a soul—but that did not seem the same thing to T39. He, himself, was more than 1,600 years old. Among the twenty-seven robots of the sanctuary, only two were younger than he.

"Are you going to do it or not?" Malachi said. "Hurry up. I'm not made of tin like you. It's cold down here in this hole."

"Yes," said T39. He looked into the box once more at the girl. She already seemed almost alive. Her face was bright and clear. Her hair was a silver wreath around her head. T39 knew enough of man to know that this girl was very beautiful. For a moment, he felt very sad. "Yes, of course."

"I'll hold the torch."

"Be careful with the light. If it catches the knives—"

"Yes, I know, I know. Hurry it up."

The operation was quick—simple—soon done. During the past months, T39 had had much

practice with his knives and scalpels. At first, the skull proved difficult to penetrate, but after a moment's brief hesitation, T39 understood the correct procedure. After that, there was no delay. Then it was out. Now he clutched it warmly between his soft, padded hands. He held it high, staring at its revealed beauty as the torchlight made it glisten in his hands like a sparkling jewel. It was a brain—a human brain.

"Here," he said, unable to think of anything else, "it is."

"I know," Malachi said.

"And what do you think?"

"I think it's lovely."

"In truth?"

"In lie. In truth, a brain is nothing but a moist hunk of gray matter. A human brain is no different or better than a dog brain except that it's a few inches larger. Do you expect me to act impressed? I don't need to worship men; I knew them. They were no better than me; if anything, they were worse. At least I'm still alive, which ought to prove something. You—you're different. You have nothing up there but a maze of wires and circuits constantly going beep, beep, beep. But I've got a brain—the same as any man."

Any other time, T39 would have argued with the dog, calmly pointing out (for what seemed the millionth time) that the brain of a robot was modeled directly after that of a man, that the missing ingredient—that which man pos-

sessed and robot and dog did not—was simply a soul, but he did not. He realized that he no longer cared about these simple matters. Turning suddenly, he raced for the door. He wanted to get away. Partly, this was fear. Now that his work was finally done, the fear he had kept so long subdued was breaking free. But there was more to it than fear. He wanted to get home. He wanted to start work. Now that he truly saw—for the first time—the probability of success, he wanted nothing except to get it done—get it over. He didn't feel he could waste a precious second.

Turning back, he told the dog, "You bring the torch and keep me surrounded with light. If, because of you, I slip and drop the brain, I swear I'll cut yours out and use it instead."

Malachi said nothing. His surprise was plain enough. T39 had never talked to him this way before. Was he learning anger? T39 did not explain—robots had long known anger, but they also knew how to control the emotion, the same as they did with fear. He stepped away, using his normal feet again, and almost humbly, the dog trotted behind, holding the torch rigidly upright between clenched jaws. They left the vault, crossed the cavern, climbed the sloping ramp. Neither spoke.

Outside, the moon was a fat smiling yellow face staked in the center of a dark but star-splattered sky. The craters of the

moon stood hugely revealed like myriad staring eyes. T39 streaked swiftly across the bleak forzen landscape of the ancient earth. The dog—torch flaming in his teeth—ran leaping to keep pace. They approached the sheer flat face of a towering cliff and, suddenly, the torch revealed the mouth of a cave. Without pause, the two were swallowed inside while behind them, unseen, a sudden star merrily twinkled, then fell flaming toward the earth.

THE CAVES in the cliff where the robots lived were known as the sanctuary. Once—hundreds of thousands of years before—a great city of eight million men and women had stood on this spot, but this city had long ago turned to rubble, and the mountains, which had sheltered the city, had run faraway to the east, and the great western sea, which had lapped at the streets of the city, had drained and dwindled into absolute nothingness. Only the caves and the robots and the sheer rocky cliff now remained to mark the passing of a great city, an even greater civilization; these and the one-hundred twenty three human beings who presently slept far below in the Cavern of Man.

The robots drew their names from long forgotten ancestors. It worked this way: originally, in the beginning, when the sanctuary was first conceived, there had been twenty-six. In order to sim-

plify, the human creators of these robots had named them A and B and C and D and so on through Z. Now—many generations later—there lived in the sanctuary A9 and T39 and R25 and X11—each successive number indicating the passing of a single ancestor. When a particular robot, after due consideration, decided that he was prepared and willing to depart this life, tradition dictated that he should first father a son, naming him after himself (plus one), and when this was done and he was fully convinced that his created successor was able to function properly, then he should quietly disconnect his prime components and thus die. Some four centuries ago, A9 had gone past the cliffs and beyond the frozen river and over the jagged mountains and down through the deep yellow valley to the place where the gray brick factory lay hidden behind the sweeping foliage of the big blue tree and had there, properly, fathered his son A10, but, refusing to explain his actions, A9 had then accompanied A10 back to the sanctuary and both had lived there ever since. So now there were twenty-seven in the sanctuary. And—of course—one dog.

There was, however, more of a purpose to the lives of these robots than pure meaningless rote and tradition, for in truth the original twenty-six (and all their subsequent descendants) had been created and placed in their sanctuary for a single and particu-

lar reason, which was intimately related to the mysteries of the Cavern of Man.

Centuries ago, at a time when the last few members of the human race were busily perishing from the earth, a handful of men, aware of the reasons for this sudden and abrupt end, had been determined that the human race should not be allowed to disappear wholly from the world without so much as a lasting trace. Some must live—they felt—in order that the race could be continued and replenished at some better and later time. In the end, these men had decided that it should be they, themselves, who survived, and so—working in the very center of one of man's greatest cities, where secrecy was truly possible—these men had built and stocked a vast underground cavern. They had installed machinery and created robots, and when this was done, their preparations complete, these men and women (one hundred twenty-three of them) had gone deep into their own cavern to a place they called the vault and had there lain in their own coffins and had—for all physical purposes—died. Within a year, the rest of the human race was dead.

But these men had not died—not in the full sense of the term. It was their intention merely to sleep for a thousand years, by which time the great Cloud of Insanity—as they termed

it—should long since have passed from the earth and a time for renewal would truly be at hand. The thousand years passed. The one hundred twenty-three slept, tended by their robots and nourished by the machinery which kept their brains from dying and their flesh from rotting and their souls (perhaps) from departing. At the end of the thousand years, something went wrong. The robots tried; the machinery tried. The men could not be awakened. Another effort was mounted the following year—and the one after that—but it was hopeless. The machinery—built to last forever—continued to function. The one hundred twenty-three did not rot away or turn to dust, but neither did they live; they slept. And the robots entered a second generation, then a third, a fourth, and soon the truth of their purpose was forgotten.

In fact, the robots barely lived; they existed. For what was there for them to do with their lives? They worshipped, for with the loss of their real purpose had come a need to replace it with another, and a religion had been allowed to develop, centered around the worship of man and his relics as great and sacred things. The robots talked among themselves—but after centuries of conversation with the same twenty-five others, talk quickly loses its freshness and interest; there is little to say that has not

been said a hundred times over. And they stood; they sat; they thought. Sometimes, they walked. That was all.

The robot T39 spent 1,628 years standing and sitting and thinking and talking and walking. After that—for two months—he watched and listened to the library of natural language books he had discovered in the Cavern of Man. He could not understand the words, but the pictures were plain enough. With the help of these books, and one story in particular, he came to conceive and devise a new purpose in life for himself and the other robots.

T39 intended to create a man—build a human being. He sought out the one creature who might be willing to help him—the dog, Malachi—and two years later, after endless days and nights of talk, book watching, explanations from the dog, and operations conducted deep in the Cavern of Man, eventually venturing into the sacred vault itself, they were ready.

As for the rest of it—the history of the sanctuary—the story of the city and the end of man—the truth behind the cavern—T39 knew none of this. Only one creature did: the dog. Malachi knew it all; he knew it very well indeed.

UNMOVING and as yet unalive, the body of the man lay near the back wall of the cave, hidden from casual view by the steep sides of the ten-foot wooden vat in which

he rested. T39 had carved the vat weeks ago from the trunk of a big hardwood tree and it was filled with a combination of certain precious chemicals—whose discovery and production had been the work of many months. The chemicals covered the man completely, like dark bath water, and around the vat, the dog Malachi scurried hurriedly, using his teeth and paws to move and adjust the wires that went from the vat (and the man inside) to the mouth of the cave and then on into the night. The cave was small—only a single cold room; it was T39's home, converted for the moment into a makeshift laboratory. Stopping, the dog peered down into the vat. He murmured, "All right—fine—splendid," then hurried away. He moved hastily in his work, knowing there was little time to spare if they wished to act tonight, and they did, for everything was ready now; the fated time to act seemed powerfully at hand. The storm had come upon them suddenly tonight, and they had not been prepared, but they had chosen to act in spite of this. Already, the raging sky outside was rising toward a final crescendo. The dog cursed and hurried. To create a man—to bring to him the final spark of true life—electricity was needed, electricity drawn whole and pure from the storming sky outside.

T39 wanted to help the dog but he could not. He stood at the front of the cave with A10—son of

A9—who was raging. His slick polished form glistened with splattered rain. He waved his arms furiously and his lips clanged and clashed. The noise of the storm howled fiercely only inches away, drowning his shouted words.

T39 looked hopelessly at the dog, then turned to A10. He shouted, "Come!" and waved a hand at the rear of the cave. "I cannot hear you!"

At the sound of the other's voice, A10 calmed instantly. He nodded and glided swiftly backward. T39 hurried to keep pace. A10 said, "That—" he meant the vat—"in there—is it—?"

"Yes," T39 said. "That is the man."

"He is done?"

"Don't you know?"

"They all know. Reports—you were seen entering the cavern many times. Yesterday—when you were there—F27 came here, and W40, and they saw—they saw the man."

"And what do they intend to do?"

"I—nothing. What can we do? But I have come to ask—"

"Here. Sit down. Wipe yourself dry. You don't want to rust."

"No!" A10 spun away. Desperately, he wheeled around the cave. He struck a wall, bounced off, turned toward the vat. The dog growled, leaped at the robot, drove him back. A10 ran, screaming, "No! I don't want to see it! I won't! I won't!"

T39 went to him, laid a warm pulsating arm around his back. "Yes, it is a man, and he will live—yes—tonight. You will see him walk."

"But I don't want—I will go."

"No, the storm. It is too dangerous. You must stay."

"I won't see him!"

Again T39 calmed the other. "Man is our master."

"Not that man. He is . . . something else. You made him, T39. They say you took parts—arms and legs and all the things inside—took them from the men in the cavern—and you made him."

"He is still a man." T39 laughed gently. He was the first of the robots born with his trait—the others had had to learn it deliberately. "Oh, just listen to that."

Lightning crackled fiercely in the distance, engulfing the cave in a sudden wave of white light. Howling, the storm swept past the mouth of the cave, sounding like a pack of giant maddened wolves raging at the night. Hopelessly, A10 turned away. He murmured, "Why?"

Malachi came running from the back of the cave. He glanced at the other, then looked at T39: "Elements connected—transformer adjusted. Now there's only the pole to be checked."

"Then go," said T39.

"And him?" meaning A10.

"He won't harm anything—not without the others. I think he

came to warn me."

"All right," the dog said, and he leaped away. The darkness swallowed him immediately, but T39 sensed the sound of his padded feet moving swiftly up the ladder outside. Malachi was going to the flat plateau atop the cliff, where he had earlier installed a tall metal pole they had found in the ruins to the south. The pole was designed to draw the electricity of life down from above, down through the wires and into the cave, then through the transformer and finally—at last—into the body of the man who lay waiting for the arrival of life. It would happen; it must happen. T39 smiled with sudden and genuine pleasure. Beside him, A10 wept painfully, without tears. The act meant nothing to T39, who knew it for what it was—crying was not inborn with any robot. Lightning suddenly flared again—much closer this time. Very close. Almost—almost.

"Now! Now!" screamed T39, waving blunted handless arms at the hidden sky. "Come down to me now!" And the dog returned, his fur dripping, his tail soaked. He shook himself carefully.

"The cliff to the north," he said. "We should be next."

"Then you had better watch the transformer."

"Yes." And the dog ran to the back wall beside the vat. A tiny metal black box sat on the floor here. Squatting down, the dog flicked his paws, toes separated,

twisting dials as well as he could.

T39 extended a pair of hands and turned back to A10. He patted him kindly on the back and said, "It's almost over now. There is nothing you or the others can do. But, you must understand, I am doing nothing wrong. Can't you see that? I am trying to help all of us. Think of it: in a matter of minutes, a true man will walk among us for the first time known: He will speak. Think of the things he can tell us."

"I—" said A10, but then he was weeping again.

T39 said, "Stop. Please. For me."

"Yes." A10 tried to stop. "I'm sorry. I was . . ."

"There is something I would like to ask you."

"Yes?"

"Would you mind—mind greatly—if I were to refer to you as she. Instead of as he, I mean."

"What is she?" A10 asked. "Is it different?"

"A she is an opposite of a he. In man, there is also woman, and woman is the she. But with us, there is no woman and no she. But I thought—"

The cave glowed whitely. The lightning had come. The wires on the floor shook and twisted. A10 screamed. Malachi howled. The lightning was gone in a second. Upon the walls, torches flickered briefly as if touched by a gentle wind. At the back of the cave, the black box—the transformer—exploded. The whole of the

cave shook like a leaf in a storm. Rocks fell from the ceiling. A stone struck T39 flat on the head and he fell to one knee. Malachi howled louder than ever. T39 looked. Through the dust, he saw that the dog was on fire.

He struggled to his feet, rushed across the cave. Raising a hand, he opened a hole in his palm. Water sprayed forth in a thick cool stream. The dog ran to him, flames licking brightly at his flesh. He fell beneath the stream. A10 cried savagely, shrieks and screams coming from her lips in rhythmic, certain spasms. Without moving his palm, T39 wheeled and told her to shut up.

When he turned back to the dog, he saw that the fire was out. Malachi lay upon the floor, wet, unmoving, whimpering. T39 knelt at his side and changed his hands to soft fur gloves and stroked the places on the dog's back where the fur had burned away. The skin beneath was an ancient crust—yellowed—like parchment.

The dog tried to roll to his feet. He stood once, twitched, quivered, collapsed. His tail flopped sadly in the dust. "Look in the vat," he said. "I cannot."

"You are all right?"

Malachi struggled to answer. "Yes."

Standing, T39 slowly approached the vat. A large jagged rock had fallen from the ceiling and chipped a huge chunk out of the wood. T39 knew it was hopeless, and the fault was his.

Malachi had been the one to suggest lightning as a substitute for electricity, but he had agreed. Real electricity had been available at the factory where the new robots were fathered, but T39 had been reluctant to go there—he had been afraid; the old superstitions loomed larger in his life than he would admit. It was his fault—yes. The lightning had been too powerful. He stood beside the vat but did not look—not yet—for he knew what was there. He could hear it: bubbling, boiling, steaming. The wood was singed on the outside, he saw. The man had to be dead. Gone. Burned. After centuries of waiting, he had returned again to ash and dust in a single second.

Malachi, pulling himself across the floor on trembling forelegs, said: "Look."

T39 leaned forward. And looked.

Within the vat, below the boiling bath of chemicals, he saw the man. And he saw: two eyes staring back at him: one blue, one brown, both crisp and clear and—

Alive.

"It's alive," he whispered. "*He is alive.*"

"No!" cried Malachi.

"Yes!"

T39 backed away from the vat and motioned to the dog, telling him to stop. "He's coming out. I saw him. He's moving. Don't help. Let him come. I want to see him move with my own eyes."

The dog dropped, waited. T39

knew he ought to help him. He was suffering. But there would be plenty of time for that later. Turning once only, he saw that A10 had gone, but he gave this not a second thought.

He eyes were fixed on the vat. For a hand had emerged from below and clasped the burnt edge of the wood. The fingers were long and straight—like pale white spikes. Then the face appeared. The shoulders. Chest. The waist. The man stood upright in the vat and his eyes met those of T39.

"Yes," said T39.

In a single bound, the man leaped easily to the floor of the cave, his knees tensed powerfully. Raising his hands over his head, he opened the palms and stared, fascinated, at his own living flesh.

This man, whom T39 had created over a period of many long months out of bits and pieces of other men dead for thousands of centuries, was a mockery upon the sacred image of man. He stood more than seven feet off the ground—taller than any robot—and weighed nearly four hundred pounds. His limbs did not match. His flesh was a color colorful patchwork of white and yellow and red and black, and the skin was tied and twisted and torn and sewn, and the seams showed clearly like dark red slashes. His body and head were totally without hair. His face was a twisted lump of muscle and bone. He had eyes, a mouth and ears. But no nose. He had teeth.

T39 saw none of this. What he saw instead was a man, and he said, "My master."

Behind him, he heard a commotion at the front of the cave and Malachi's answering growl, but he came steadily forward on soft padded feet, approaching the man, his creation, his eyes seeing, believing, not moving.

When he reached the man, he stopped. He did not know what to do—he waited.

The man tried to speak. The words caught in his throat, then suddenly escaped in a spilling explosion of grunts and hisses and mews and moans: the language of man.

T39 turned to ask Malachi, but as he did, the man seemed to see the robot truly for the first time. He glared at the machine which had born him and there—in the gleaming polished metal of the robot's frame—he saw something else: he saw himself. Reflection.

The man screamed.

At the sound, T39 turned back.

The man lunged forward. Suddenly, his hands were fists and they slammed against the robot's chest. T39 wheeled, crying out, unable to flee or protect himself, searching vainly for understanding. The hands were claws and tore at his face.

Malachi growled. Leaping forward, his burnt legs slipping, sliding, he dived at the man. His teeth slashed deep into the flesh of the man's leg. Blood—red and thick—streamed from the wound.

The man yelped and drew back. He swung a slow fist at the dog, who ducked, lashed forward, out the man again. The dog was shouting, screaming, and his words were the language of man.

T39 watched, only his eyes moving. Slowly, Malachi drove the man back toward the farthest corner of the cave. The man shouted and screamed; the dog shouted back. Again and again, his teeth slashed and slashed. The man's resistance faded. He backed into the wall, started to turn, then suddenly sat. The dog stood over him, growling and shouting. The man's head toppled forward and his shoulders moved evenly.

T39 realized that the man had fallen asleep. For some reason, he was not surprised. Turning, he looked at the mouth of the cave, and they were all there—the twenty-six robots—and they had seen.

A9, the patriarch, stood a little in front of the others. He spoke: "So you have gone and done it, T39."

"Yes," said T39, "I have."

"And there's nothing you can do, no way to reverse this process? This man is alive and he will stay alive?"

"Yes, he is alive."

A9 came forward hesitantly, and the others followed him in a line. Their bodies flickered in the torchlight—the rain water sparkled gloriously upon their polished frames.

A9 halted in front of the sleep-

ing man. Malachi crouched tensely between the two, but A9 paid the dog no mind. Slowly, almost painfully, he fell to his knees. He turned and waited until the others—grouped behind him in a formless cluster—had done the same.

Then he said, "My master."

II

AFTER THE ROBOTS had gone, T39 went to the front of the cave, just barely out of reach of the rain, and he stood without moving or speaking. For the rest of the night, he remained here, and not once did he so much as utter a sound or move an inch. From where he stood, it was impossible to see anything of the world outside the cave except for a tiny slice of wet, muddy earth. But T39 did not see even this much, for his senses were sealed off; he existed wholly within himself. The storm passed and the rain ceased, but T39 knew none of this. He was not meditating or concentrating or even just thinking. His mind was a blank; he was resting. If a robot could suffer from such a thing as exhaustion—either mental or physical or both—then this was what now affected T39. He could not have moved or spoken even if he had wished. The sun rose that first morning and began to follow its careful course across the sky, and still T39 did not move. Then the sun set and the moon appeared instead, a sliver

smaller than the night before, and then it too was gone and the sun once more prepared to take control of the sky.

At dawn this second morning, T39 awoke. He felt strong and powerful, refreshed and relaxed. Briefly, as awareness returned to him, he could remember nothing, but then, turning, he saw the dog crouched near the back of the cave. There beside him, squatting on his haunches above a torn bone, was the man.

Malachi said, "Welcome back."

"That is him," T39 said, remembering. "The man I made."

"You don't remember?"

"I do now. What has happened?"

"I've been trying to teach him how to talk," Malachi said. "That's one thing. Our language is only a corruption of his, so I thought it ought to be easy, but I'm afraid he isn't a very apt pupil. He can't seem to remember his own language very well either. I suppose it'll all come back to him eventually. Twice he's tried to escape, but he's slow yet, and I stopped him both times. I think he's afraid of man. And A9 came to see you a couple times, and A10 was here at least once, but when they saw you, they nodded and went away. I think they're both afraid of him."

"They are. Can I try to talk to him?"

"He only knows a few words."

"Which ones?"

"He won't talk to you. He hates

you."

"No. Why? I made him."

"That's why."

But T39 did not intend to be put off so easily. There were many questions he wished to ask the man, and already too much time had been wasted. He did not believe Malachi anyway. Why should the man hate him for bestowing renewed life upon him? T39 did not think that made very much sense at all. Perhaps the man was not yet ready for a new life—surely this changed world was a bewilderment to him—but in time he would come to understand. T39 was sure of this much.

He approached the man cautiously. As he did, the man glanced up. Their eyes met, and after that, the man followed his every step. When he was still a dozen feet away, the man dropped the bone he had continued to chew. He stood. To T39 his movements were incredibly slow, painstaking, careful. T39 continued forward. Malachi murmured something that sounded like, "Oh, no." Then the man launched himself forward. It was the same as the first night. The man slid past the dog, regained his feet, and came on again. He clenched his hands into huge fists. Hate burned brightly in his eyes, and T39 saw it there. The man's teeth were bared.

T39 did not move. He raised an arm and shielded his eyes, but that was all.

But the man stopped too.

He had seen himself again. T39

could feel the glinting reflection shining brightly upon his chest. He tried to move away so that the man would not have to see, but it was too late.

The man turned away. A sound came from deep inside his chest, and then he was crying real tears.

T39 wanted to console his creation, but Malachi said no. "Get out of here—don't try to touch him. Go out, find some mud, cover yourself. If you come any closer, he'll turn and claw your eyes out and I'm not so sure you'd be able to stop him. I know I wouldn't even try."

"But—but why?" asked T39, indicating his chest, which still contained the picture of the reflected man.

"Because you made him the way he is. He thinks you made him horrible."

"But it was the only way. You know that, Malachi. It was your idea. Too many of the bodies were mutilated. We couldn't find one that was whole and perfect, so we had to make one. Explain that to him. Tell him that he might appear horrible to another man, but there aren't any men here. Tell him robots have no feelings of horror."

The man had fallen to his knees. His sobs sounded like sudden explosions in the close confines of the cave. "Go to the rest of them," Malachi said. "I'll try to talk to him. You go and talk to them."

"Where are they?"

"They're down by the cavern, standing in their circle. I think they've been out there ever since they left here that first night. I think A9 has tried to get them to leave a couple of times, but they won't budge. I think some of them are rusting because of the rain, and I think it's going to snow before too much longer, so you had better go out. Somebody has to save them."

"But what do they want?"

"They want the same thing you want, only they have a different way of going about it. They're out there now waiting for him—" he meant the man, who was no longer crying but lay motionlessly on his belly, his exposed back cut and scarred from where he had rubbed against the sharp rocks at the back of the cave—"for him to bring their souls."

"I had better go," said T39.

"Maybe with you gone, I can get him to try to talk."

"Yes." T39 left the cave sadly, knowing that it was largely his own fault that the situation had been allowed to stray so far out of control. If he had only managed to stay awake and alert, if he had been able to gain the confidence of his creation, then much of this might well have been avoided.

Outside—it was early yet—the sun was a small red dot glowing darkly, like a tiny frozen dot, upon the pale white peaks of the distant eastern hills. Crossing the cold hard ground, T39 turned toward the Cavern of Man. Already,

he could clearly hear the sound of many combined voices loudly raised in a careful solemn chant. Above, a huge leathery bird floated gently past the rim of the daylight moon. T39 paused to watch. He had never seen a bird so large before. Its wingspan was a good ten feet. He was impressed. The whole world was constantly changing—and quickly—sometimes too quickly for him.

Within the shadow of the heavy steel door that led down to the Cavern of Man, the robots stood in a circle. At the center of the circle was A9. As T39 approached, A9 saw him coming and raised an arm to halt the chant. T39 had recognized the words as part of the chant of prelude, a portion of the ceremony of resurrection which always immediately preceded actual withdrawal. T39 was glad that he had arrived before then.

A place was silently made for him within the circle, and he found himself standing next to A10, and he turned and looked at her, wanting to speak, but as his eyes met her eyes, he saw that she intended to say nothing. At last, looking around, he understood that the others were expecting him to speak. He tried hastily to think of appropriate phrases.

"The man is resting," he told them, "and he will not be able to come to us for some time. And he is eating. Unlike us, men must consume food several times a day. And water—they must drink

water as well. Malachi is teaching him our language. The man has promised: when he is able to come and speak with us, he will."

"Then we must continue our remembrances until he does," said a robot to the left of T39.

"I see it as a test," said another. "We must prove our faith and devotion, then he will come."

"No," T39 said flatly. "This is not a test. The man means only what he says." But looking at the others, he saw that such explanations were futile. Why hadn't he foreseen that this would occur? The old superstitions were still strong. T39 looked for help to A9, who asked another question:

"What do you think we should do, T39?"

"I think you ought to return to your caves. If you do not, you may rust before the man can come to you. Further rain already approaches from the south. There is a hint of snow in the air."

"Another test," said a robot.

"Yes," agreed another.

"Then perhaps we ought simply to continue with our ceremony," said A9, "if we are agreed that we do not wish to leave. T39—perhaps you will consent to go and convey our feelings to the man."

T39 said, "No. Not unless all of you agree to leave here and now."

"But we cannot do that," A9 said.

There was a rumble of agreement.

"We must withdraw," A9 added. And T39—for the first time—saw that the old robot was no better than any of the others. He, too, was burdened by the weight of his own foolish superstitions.

"Have it your own way," T39 mumbled. Then, for reasons he could not immediately fathom, he did not leave, but instead remained in the circle, and when the others withdrew, he did too. His limbs and head disappeared inside his bodily frame, and like the others, T39 became a polished steel box seated flat upon the cold frozen ground. Normally, this particular ceremony—that of full withdrawal—was conducted only once a year at the time when the sun was smallest in the sky. No one knew the full meaning of the rite. It was felt to be the oldest and most important of all the ceremonies and was officially known as the Ceremony for the Raising of Man, although no robot had ever heard of any man actually rising at this time. But it did seem an appropriate response to the occasion, and T39 was strangely moved as the outer world disappeared from his sight and the blackness predominated. The words of the chant itself had long since lost any meaning beyond the purely liturgical. The language was the language of man, but often, listening to the intonation, T39 had sensed a meaning of sorts within the chanted phrases. Some it it he ac-

tually understood quite clearly. Perhaps this was why he had chosen to remain with the others. Now, with a living man so very near, the whole meaning might be revealed to him at last.

When all the robots had withdrawn, A9, whose head alone remained exposed, began the intonation: "In the time of the great darkness, it became necessary for man, who was the true ruler of the earth and the heavens as well, to bring forth children to tend to his earthly domain while he absented himself from the physical world in order to rest and sleep till the darkening clouds had passed from the land. And this was easily accomplished, and the children of man were known as robots, and they were made after the image of man, with hands and feet and eyes and lips like man, so that they might never forget the greatness of their creators. Then man told his children that he would some day return and that they must obey his precepts and decrees, for if they did this, then on the day of his resurrection, man would bring with him from the heavens humanly souls which he would kindly bestow upon his children in reward for their constant faith and obedience, and then they too would stand as men among all men. But the time for man's return came and passed, and his children were much disturbed, and many wept, saying that man had forsaken them, but others said more truly

that man was merely testing his children. And then the word came. Continue to watch the gates of the cavern; protect the remains of your slumbering fathers; continue your numbers as always the same. And these were the precepts and decrees and were rigidly obeyed, for man would some day return and his promises would—"

This was the way T39 understood it. There was more—much more—that was still beyond him.

But A9 had stopped.

Then, suddenly, in a voice different from before, he cried: "Arise!"

With the others, T39 extended his head and revealed his arms and legs. He turned and followed A9's pointing hand. He saw him coming across from the cliff. It was the man. He came alone, moving in a strange halting motion, as if each of his legs possessed its own free will. His arms dangled aimlessly at his sides. His head quivered, jerked, shook. T39 could hear him screaming. Moaning.

"He has come to us," whispered a robot. "He has risen—he has heard."

Another shouted, "Master!" and took a forward step.

"No!" T39 cried.

The robot paused. Hastily, T39 scanned the nearby terrain. Where was Malachi? Why had he allowed the robot to come out alone? Had something happened? T39 could see nothing except the

man ambling ever closer, and suddenly, he was afraid. What if the man recognized him? Could he? T39 did not think so, but what if—?

"Hold still!" A9 commanded. "Wait!"

It was x11. Next to A9, he was the oldest of the robots. Breaking from the circle, he sped like a tiny animal across the ground on short stumpy legs—his other components long since lost or broken—and he went straight toward the man, who came stumbling ahead without pause. For a moment, T39 could say nothing, think nothing. He watched the scene: the two creatures coming together, so alike in appearance yet so different, meeting like father and son, and he was deeply moved, feeling the sting of tears building in his skull:

Then they met. Robot and man. They merged.

X11 screamed.

They fell to the ground together. The man leaped up first, and he was shouting. The words were clear: he was saying: "Hold still—all of you—don't move!" Something bright glinted in his fist. He hurled it high.

A tool. A knife. No—a screwdriver. He held it over his head.

The robots remained in their circle, able to watch but unable to move. Stooping down, the man opened the robot's frame. His hands disappeared inside. Wires snapped, broke. Mechanical parts were pried loose from their

proper places—still spinning, flashing, whirling—and thrown high in the air. Again and again, x11 screamed, the fear of death causing his voice to grow ever shriller and shriller, for the man was killing him. In a single second, with ease, the robot could have taken the man and squashed him flat, but he did nothing; he lay there and died. The man found the circuits of speech high in the robot's chest—jerked—tore. Then x11 was silent.

Breaking from the circle, T39 raced toward the man, moving on swiftly spinning wheels. He came closer and closer and saw that x11 was not yet dead. The robot's head was turned toward T39, and he saw an expression—a true expression—upon the robot's face. He saw pain and fear and bewilderment. Desperately, T39 came faster.

The man saw him coming. He paused, raising a hand, and shouted: "Halt!"

T39 halted.

The man added, "Don't move—stay there."

Then, looking across the flat barren land at the robot who was his creator, the man began to laugh. He giggled. Standing, he left x11 as he lay and came toward T39 saw something else: it was the dog—Malachi. A new voice cracked the silence of the day. "Stop!" Giggling again, the man came forward, taking long, swooping, graceful steps. Again, Malachi shouted. This time, the

man heard him. He turned, saw the dog and stopped. He raised the screwdriver and flipped it over his shoulder. The pointed end struck T39 squarely in the face. Glass crackled, broke. His vision dimmed, then returned.

Malachi stood in front of the man, teeth gleaming. "Tell them!"

The man said, "No."

Malachi feinted toward the man's legs. His jaws snapped.

The man giggled again. Turning, he faced the robots. He said, "Revocation of previous decrees."

At the sound of these meaningless words, T39 felt the tingle of life return to his body. Tentatively, he wriggled a hand. He felt it move. Then he took a backward step.

Malachi had gathered the man close to him. He drove him back toward the cave. T39 waited until the two of them were mere shadows against the gray cliff of the sanctuary.

Then he went to x11 and crouched beside his fallen form. There was nothing. A moment later, A9 was there too. And the others.

"He's dead," T39 said. "He killed him."

"Yes," said A9.

T39 stood, facing the others, wanting to say something, sensing that they expected it, wanting to explain, but none of them seemed more than vaguely aware that he existed. Instead, they looked at the polished lifeless form of the dead robot.

"But why?" one asked abruptly. Looking at A9, he repeated his question, but A9 only shook his head. He looked at T39.

"You tell him," he said.

"I don't know," said T39.

"Were we not worthy? Did we not stand the proper watch? Obey the precepts? The decrees? Of us all," said A9, "only I have disobeyed. Yet I am alive."

"I said I didn't know."

"But you must know. You made him."

"I did." But, still, in spite of this, T39 did not know.

III

DURING the seven nights and days immediately following the death of x11, four additional robots—C36, Q21, F27 and K40—were disconnected. T39 tried his best to prevent these murders—there was no other word—but what could he do? Easily and quickly, now that he had a purpose, the man had learned a vocabulary of robot language sufficient to allow him to communicate his basic needs and desires, and whatever the man wanted T39 to do, he only had to tell him and T39 would do it. T39 soon realized that he could not help himself; like all of the robots, he had been programmed at birth to obey the commands of man—any man—even this one. Of them all, only Malachi could control the man, but Malachi had to sleep and eat and he said he couldn't be penned up forever in-

side a cold wet cave. So, there were always occasions when the dog was absent and the man was free from his control, and these were the times when he chose to order T39 aside and went out and casually reduced the number of robots by another individual.

On the seventh night, T39 was convinced that he had at last managed to solve the immediate problem. Malachi said he was hungry and wanted to go out for food, so T39 took the man to the rear of the cave and bound him tightly and securely with strong ropes. Then, when the dog was ready to leave, T39 went with him. Outside, it was snowing. It had been for several hours. The earth was covered with a sleek pure blanket of enveloping whiteness. Risking the dangers of exposure, T39 found a spot against the cliff that was partially sheltered by an overhanging rock. He could stand here out of the snow, and it was sufficiently distant from his own cave that the man's voice could not carry. T39 sent Malachi back to the cave and ordered him to shout his loudest, then howl. T39 listened with all his strength but heard nothing. He was satisfied.

Then the dog was gone into the night, and as soon as he disappeared, a fierce wind suddenly appeared, blowing directly toward the cliff where T39 stood. He was driven back, forced to press himself closer and closer to the face of the cliff, and still the wind per-

sisted, rushing against him inexorably like the waves of a furious sea.

The man screamed: "Look at me!"

T39 turned back and looked straight at the man, whose mask of impartial rationality had been stripped away. His eyes were blazing pits of rage and frustration. There was hate, disgust. He tried to speak, but the words tripped over his tongue, emerging as senseless, meaningless grunts and wails. He spoke a language whose meaning was known only to him; he screamed wordless words at nothing and no one.

Slowly, he calmed. He murmured gently to himself, almost singing, then suddenly lifted his head and gazed at T39 as if seeing him truly for the first time. "You must obey me," he said, almost pleading. "I am a man. You must. You will. Please."

T39 said, "Yes." All resistance had faded; he knew it was hopeless now to try. Why not obey the man and get it done with? He went to the back of the cave. He untied the ropes that bound the man. He glanced into the dark corners of the cave, only confirming his first impression: the dog was not here. He asked the man, who merely grinned, then shook his head. Then T39 saw something. Near the front of the cave was a half-circle of wet footprints coming in from the snow, then turning and going back out again. T39 looked at the man to see

what he was doing. He was crouched on the floor, hugging himself with his arms, murmuring again, and shivering, shaking. Hurriedly, before the man could recover and order him back, T39 went to the mouth of the cave and looked outside. There were further prints here in the snow. So Malachi had returned. It was the dog he had heard. But he had turned and left again—immediately. Why?

Vainly, T39 peered into the dark as the minutes crept past, searching for a vision of the returning dog, but the minutes seemed to turn into hours, and still he saw nothing. Once, feeling a tightness in both elbows, he almost allowed himself to go back and look in the cave to make certain that he had not missed the dog, but he fought against the urge. He exercised the joints of his arms, lifting his hands and making man-like fists with them. Soon, he felt better; he stayed.

Then he heard a sound that was not the wind, and he strained to make sense of it. Yes—he was sure. It was the dog. He heard him padding close-by. He called: “Malachi!”

In reply, he heard a growl. He thought he did, and called again, but this time there was nothing. It had to be Malachi. He was sure that he had returned. His joints were getting tight again. He was afraid. He moved away from the cliff. Easily, he slid—on ski-clad feet—through the snow. Again

and again, he called the dog.

He reached the cave, called again, then went inside. As soon as his feet touched hard ground, he knew that he had made a mistake. The man was there—alone. In the torchlight, he raised his face. It seemed to glimmer amid the gathering shadows. T39 turned to flee.

“Unleash me,” the man said, simply.

T39 tried to stand fast: “No.”

The man laughed. “I said unleash me.”

Again, T39 refused, and he turned his head, twisting his neck to gaze forlornly at the snow falling outside. It seemed so near that he almost knew that he could reach out and touch it. But that was an illusion, he thought.

The man came up from behind. His shivering had passed; he was calm again. Almost sadly, as though it were something he had to say through no choice of his own: “Stay here—don’t follow me.”

T39 watched the man disappear into the midst of swirling snow. A moment later, he thought he heard the sound of footsteps going up the ladder that led to the caves above. He heard another sound from outside the cave and said, “Malachi?” but it was only the wind. Sometime after this, sitting in the farthest, darkest corner of the cave, with his face turned squarely to the wall, T39 heard a scream.

A10 WAS ALONE in her cave. Not a torch burned—not a campfire. It was dark. Carrying his torch inside, T39 held it high and saw her sitting at the back. He placed the torch on the wall.

"Has the snow stopped?" she asked him.

"Yes, it's almost morning."

"A9," she said, "is dead. Don't tell me you're sorry because I'm not. And neither is he. I know he expected it. Since the day x11 died, he has been sitting up there alone in his cave, just waiting. He blamed himself. He disobeyed the edicts. He fathered me and did not die. We lived together like father and son. It was wrong and he knew it was wrong but he was afraid of death. He said the man was a curse brought down upon him. He used to say that. Now he says nothing."

"He was wrong. I blame myself too."

"Oh, no, you don't. You may say that—you may even think that—but you do not believe it. Where is the man?"

"In my cave. Asleep."

"The dog is with him?"

"The dog has gone. Disappeared."

"Perhaps he is more intelligent than we ever thought."

"That may be," T39 said.

"And you? Do you wish to disappear too?"

"Where could I go?"

"Anywhere. I think you ought to go to the place where the factory is. I think you ought to build others, dozens and dozens of

others, and then I think all of you ought to go away somewhere where this man could never find you. You have the whole world; don't you? There is no one else. But that's sacrilege, isn't it? The edicts say we must guard the cavern and wait for the men to return, for they will bring us our souls. When do you think they will be coming?"

"I don't," he said.

"I did. I used to think so. The night you made the man—I thought so then—remember I was there?—I thought that was sacrilege. And, before, when you were going down into the cavern and bringing him up—your man—piece by piece—I thought that too was sacrilege. But now I think I was wrong. Did anything happen to you? Were you punished? You are alive. And healthy. The man will not kill you. So, no, I do not believe it any longer. Not a bit of it. Now I know what men are: they are monsters."

"Yes," he said.

"Will you go with me?" she asked.

"No. Not until this is over. I cannot leave them here to die."

"What can you do about it?"

"I can try. Just now, before I came here, he was sleeping, and I went over and stood above him. All I had to do was change my foot into a knife, raise it, then lower it—plunge it into him to the hilt. Had I wished, I could have killed him."

"But you did not."

"He is a man."

"Is he?"

"Yes."

"Like all men?"

"I don't know," he said.

"Then both of us will stay."

TOGETHER T39 and A10 waited in the cave for the man to come for them, and soon the morning light of dawn crept powerfully into the air, bathing them both in its natural warmth, and with the light came a promise of something new—not merely a new day, but something more—a new beginning. It was as if this new day were the first day—the first day of what, neither could say for sure. The storm clouds of the night had passed, and drops of melting snow dripped down from the rocks above. T39 sat still, listening to the trickling patter of the water.

At noon, they heard another scream. This one came from far below and A10 said she was afraid. The man was awake now. A10 wanted to run away into the snow, but T39 clutched her arm and said not. He told her to wait, and for a long moment, they stood like that, her fear battling against his determination, and in the end, it was T39 who was the stronger.

Then they sat again, and soon, there came another scream, much closer this time, perhaps from the cave directly beneath them. T39 tried to remember who lived there—who was dead now—but he could not. "He will kill all of us," A10 said.

"We shall see."

"What do you mean by that? Do you believe we have any choice but to sit here and wait and die?"

"Yes, I believe that," he said. But he did not. In truth, he did not know what he believed, even if he believed anything at all. That was the reason why he was sitting here now, waiting for the man. He wanted someone to come to him who could show him what was right and what was wrong, what was true and what was not. If the man could not do it, then he would know for certain that nobody could, and that in itself would be something.

"We could leave," she said.

"Not now."

The man came. T39 looked up and saw the awful, twisted patchwork face of the man glaring at him from the bright narrow opening of the cave. T39 looked straight at the man, hoping he would not go away, then A10 saw him too, and she screamed and turned and ran until, reaching the back wall of the cave, she could run no farther.

The man entered. He came forward in an awkward, stumbling gait, bent down with his hands almost brushing the floor. He walked as though the weight of the world rested upon his back. Perhaps it did, T39 thought. This was a man—and he was the last. The man tried to keep his eyes fastened on A10, but his gaze kept drifting, brushing against that of his creator, sliding away, fright-

ened, angry.

"Stop," T39 said, when the man was even with him.

The man wheeled. He raised a hand in warning, and the screwdriver glinted there. It had never been taken from him; he could have found another easily enough.

"What do you want here?" T39 asked.

The man laughed merrily, but he was not happy. He snapped his head toward the back of the cave. "Elimination. Death." He meant A10. "The robot."

"And me?"

"You. I let alone." The man's language was not perfect—but it was clear. T39 understood every word.

"Leave her alone."

"No."

"Why are you doing this?"

The man shook his head as if he had not understood.

Again, T39 asked: "Why?"

"You made me ugly," the man said. "Before, I wasn't like this. They would tell me I was Marilyn. I had a white face, they would say, and black eyes. Not—" the man raised his hands and stroked his face—"not this."

"Then why kill them? Why not me?"

The man laughed again—quickly. It was over quickly, and he shrugged. Then he tried to talk but the words did not come, and watching him, T39 sensed his own ignorance of this creature. There was an expression on the man's face—clear and plain and obvious—but he could not

read it. With another robot, he would have known fear or anger or bitterness or suffering or joy, whatever the robot wished him to know, but this man's emotions were too strong—too overwhelming—and he could not read them. Growling suddenly like an animal, the man waved the screwdriver; he drew it back—threw it. The blade struck weakly against the robot's chest. Harmlessly, it bounced away.

"Tell me why," said T39, softly.

"Tell the dog! He says if I kill all of you, then it will be you who suffers the most. You will be alone as I am alone now and maybe you will know. That is all. I do not care." Stooping, he retrieved the screwdriver, and holding it close to him, he advanced upon A10, who cowered at the back of the cave. She made her hands into shovels and tried to dig a hole in the earth, but the earth was rock, and her hands scraped futilely. She cried then; she moaned and hid her eyes.

"Malachi told you to—"

But the man was no longer listening. He told A10: "Stop. Do not move," and she stopped moving. She ceased digging with her hands, her eyes on the floor, unmoving, and she could not see him coming. But she must have heard.

T39 waited. For a long time, he could not move, then he felt it happen at last. Something snapped. That was what it was a new feeling—one he had never

felt before. He knew he was free. He advanced upon the man.

The man heard him. He turned, lifted his hands: "Stop!" Fear was bright in his eyes. He understood. "Robot—no!"

T39 heard A10 whimpering, expecting death, and he also heard the man ordering him to stop, but the sounds were only sounds; he did not stop. He knew that he should, for his inner being still told him that he must, but the fact that this creature ahead of him was a man no longer seemed to have any importance for him. If a man was only another frightened animal, then what was he? And what was a robot, born fearless of all except man? And who was the true master of the earth? The heavens? And who had a soul and who did not? T39 thought he knew. He thought this man ahead of him was not nearly so grand and glorious a being as a mere—

"Robot!" cried the man. "Stop—no!" Disbelieving, the man jumbled his words into a single anguished shriek that did not end until T39 had grasped his hand, twisted the screwdriver away and lifted the man into his arms. The screwdriver went *clang* against the rock wall of the cave. T39 held the man warmly. For a brief instant, he cradled him close to his chest like a true son, and he wanted to explain everything to him as he would to a child. He saw amazement and bewilderment in the man's face, and he wished to erase, soothe away these fears.

If the man only knew, then he would be all right. But there wasn't time. T39 threw the man. He fell heavily, and for a moment, T39 thought it was over. But the man stood. He looked once more at the robot—the thing—the machine which had brought him into the world. T39 thought that he saw understanding there. *The man does know*, he thought with pleasure. And then he turned his back on the man, giving him not another thought, and he bent down and turned A10 so that she could see that everything was all right, and T39 did not see the man turn and run and leave the cave. Nor did he see that last expression. There was rage, yes, and awe too—but also something else—a sense of loss, a true and ultimate despair. The man had understood. A10, peering over T39's shoulder, saw, and later she tried to explain to him, and he said that he understood, and perhaps he did. By the time he left the cave, the man was no longer seeing. Both T39 and A10 heard his last scream. They understood that part immediately. The man had not stopped; he had slipped; he had fallen. A10's cave was high on the face of the cliff, and the ground was a distant faraway carpet of whiteness. The cave was silent. Outside, the constantly tender pattering of melting snow went on. But inside the cave, nothing was heard.

A10 drew T39 to the mouth of the cave and asked him to look

out. He did, peering down past the brief rocky ledge from which the man had fallen and down past the flat gray cliff itself. He saw the man—a tiny spot of color amid the vast whiteness.

"Is he dead?"—she asked him.

"I killed him," he said.

"No, it was an accident."

"But I could have killed him."

"Yes."

"That's what I meant."

IV

WHEN MALACHI SAW the glimmer of flames shining past the dark exposed hole that was the entrance to the Cavern of Man, he understood that it was truly over; now he would have to leave. He stood, barely concealed by the trunk of a small snow-covered scrub tree, upon the summit of a low bluff about a hundred yards from the cavern. He could see clearly enough—his eyesight had never failed him—and he knew there was no special point to be proved in waiting for T39 to reappear, but he decided he wanted to do it anyway. This would almost certainly be his last chance to set eyes upon another living and thinking being, and he wanted it to be T39, for whom he felt a curious sense of warmth very close to that of love, and not that other thing, that monster, that man, who was now dead.

Malachi was ready to die himself, but he knew that his time had not yet quite come. When it did, he expected he would know

it too. Now that he was leaving the sanctuary, he intended to head directly south, following the stars at night, for at least the south was warm, which was more than the east or west or north had to offer, and he expected the somewhere along the way there would come a time—it might be a day or it might be a century—when he would tire of aimlessly wandering and would lie down for a brief spot of rest and would never wake. Then he would be dead, and that would be the true end.

At the moment, watching the distant flicker of flames, he felt a curious sense of loss—curious because his dominant mood was one of intense satisfaction, almost elation. He had succeeded in doing exactly what he had originally set out to do, and he was proud of this, but he knew part of the reason for his anguish—however slight it was—was the methods he had chosen to use. He was not proud of his lies and duplications—he was not happy that T39 now hated and despised him—nor was he proud that so many robots had died because of him. Others would soon be born to assume their places, but that was hardly enough; it did not make those who had died any less dead, for robots were true creatures of life—that was the point, after all—as much as any man or dog—and they thought and felt, they lived and they died. These had died.

Malachi was the only one to have seen it happen. Over a period of hundreds of centuries, he had observed the creatures known as robots as they had slowly changed from creatures of tin and steel and wire and bolts into—into what? He had almost thought: *into men*. But that was not right. They were not men—they were robots still—but now they were robots with (if such things existed) souls. He wondered if they would ever have recognized their own slow evolution if he had not chosen to reveal it to them in the only way possible. He did not think so. In truth, the race of robots owed him a great debt, yet they would never know it. He was the Moses of their race—he had shown them the promised land—yet they would never think of him except as an alien Judas.

The most difficult part, once he had conceived his plan, was waiting for the right robot to be born, for curiosity was one of the last of the human emotions to evolve in the robots, but finally T39 had come into being, and he had been more than amply curious. So, it had been a simple enough process to convince him to try to create a man—for the legend of the returning souls burned as strongly in him as any of them—and it had been even simpler to lie about the history of the brain, for only Malachi had known the language of man and could understand the written records they had left be-

hind. He had told T39 that the brain was fifty years younger than the others—a transparent enough lie once one knew that all the men in the cavern had come there the same day—but there had, in truth, been a difference, a thing which set this one brain apart from the other one hundred twenty-two.

He remembered her name: Marilyn Tipton. Age: fifteen years. And pretty, too, if not beautiful. But also sick; ill, mad (perhaps), and stunted; retarded (surely). The mind of a nine-year-old, the records had said, full of the pain and despair, the anguish of a life that ought never to have been lived. Reading her story, he had known at once that she was what he needed, and so she had in time been born anew. For her, he felt a sense of loss too: she should have been allowed to rest forever. It should not have been necessary to make her live again (in that hideous, malformed body), but it had been. He thought so. He could see no alternative. But she was dead again now, and he felt no sadness because of that. It was better. And because of her, the robots lived.

Smoke was coming from the entrance of the cavern in sudden, quick, thick black puffs. Looking down, Malachi saw T39 emerge from the opening. A10 came with him, and together they went across the snow, and then they stopped and turned and looked back.

(cont. on page 73)

THEY'VE GOT SOME HUNGRY WOMEN THERE . . .

PG WYAL

Pg Wyal introduced us to Queer Sal and her milieu in "Border Town" (July, 1971); now, after a long pause, he resumes the story of her criminal saga across the underside of the human galaxy in quest of the one drug which can permanently enslave all of humanity . . .

illustrated by STEPHEN E. FABIAN

I
IT WAS CLOSING TIME at the *Dykes & Dolls*, but the hard-faced dame in black leathers demanded another round. She had that kind of bitchy voice that always gets more than it wants; unsurprisingly, her drink was doped. She slumped quietly to the too-thick carpet after a couple of sips.

A bouncer carried her out and dropped her on the plascrete sidewalk. Nobody paid much attention. *Dykes & Dolls* had a reputation for not standing too heavily upon ceremony.

When consciousness came filtering back, she was naked, lying on wet pavement in almost total darkness. A puddle of pallid light gloomed a few yards down the coffin-narrow alley; the glow oozed from a tiny window, high above. The pavement was invisible; nothing but shadows. She groped, scraping both calloused hands over the ground in widen-

ing arcs, trying to retrieve some sort of sense from the opaque nonsense that engulfed her. Nothing . . .

But—

There was the feel of plastic, and a sound like paper sliding over a rough wooden table. Her thumb and index finger closed around a small plastic rectangle, stroking it as if it were a blushing genital. *My credit card!* Sal gasped, and jumped to her feet in one lithe motion. She moved quickly towards the dim light.

The card was ghostly, luminous in the sickly glow. She squinted, trying to read vague letters.

It was *not* a credit card. Neatly centered, printed in green neon, was a name and address:

VICTOR E GOLD, ESQ.

SPECULATOR

131 St. Jude St., Trotskygrad

Scowling, she started to tear it up—

But wait!—

“... I FIGURED you’d come,” drawled Victor Gold, speculator. He languished behind a transparent plastic desk, long of limb and dark of eye. “Being left naked in an alley is an insult, but being left poor in the city is an injury. Especially if your, ah, means of support are, shall we say, tenuous.”

Sal clenched her teeth. “I had to go into a big ‘rape’ act, screaming and bitching and whining to the cops and about ten thousand passers-by, so I could get ahold of some clothing without explaining myself. Then I had to tell a pretty phony-sounding story to a disk-recorder, and sign my name to a complaint. I don’t think I’ve ever been so humiliated in my life!” Gold tutted sympathetically. His hand moved somewhere inside the desk, and a couple of drinks shimmered into shape on the clear desktop. Sal grabbed one without hesitation.

“You shouldn’t get so upset about a little inconvenience, my dear,” said Gold, sipping, “especially if the inconvenience was created by Victor Gold. Ahem. I didn’t bring you here just to molest or humiliate you.”

“Then why *did* you bring me here?” Sal snapped.

Gold cocked a thin eyebrow. “Inquisitive, aren’t we?”

Sal sputtered wordlessly.

“You see, I can’t afford to be too obvious. Nobody would ever think of leaving his calling-card with a cruelly debauched young



girl!" He laughed. It sounded like a rattling drainpipe, thin and metallic.

"Why can't you be too obvious?" said Sal.

"Because. Take another sip of your drink. Now sit down."

A chair moved obligingly up behind her, and she slumped into it.

"Now," began Gold, more businesslike, "let me give you an excuse, if not quite an explanation. This is not quite as whacky as it seems. Things have to look completely accidental, for one thing—I am being watched all the time, and even my private conversations are monitored."

"By whom?" Sal interjected.

"Police. Interstel, to be exact."

Interstel. Interstel, the only cooperative, interstellar agency, government, or group among five hundred rampantly independent planets, and an equal number of corporate asteroids and syndical moons. Interstel, the *only* form of cooperation that existed between any two or more worlds. And *all* of them cooperated. You had to be pretty henious to attract the attention of Interstel . . . or pretty important.

Or both.

"We're safe in here," the thin man continued, "as long as we remain within this room. I spent about ten million Kwattouri making sure of that."

Sal thought about that for a moment.

He went on. "I believe you are

in some slight need of money. No—don't get mad; I'm not talking about your credit card. I happen to know that was about to be confiscated, along with yourself, for various deficits, debits, and debts. In fact, I happen to know that you were about to be picked up by not only the police of Marx, but by another, shall we say larger, organization. Shall I name it?"

She nodded, her face tense and frightened.

"Interstel."

"Wh-why?" she croaked.

"Piracy." The word was flat. "It seems you had something to do with a business transaction, a bad one at that, on a place called *Ching'r*, a minor eetee planet about 500 lightyears from Earth. Something to do with a shipment of microEl—"

"Stop," Sal whispered. "I know all about it."

"Then you don't deny it?" A leer.

"Deny it? I thought you—"
Christ!

"Spilled the beans, my dear. Actually, it was just a shrewd guess, based on certain information in the flightplan you registered with the Ports Authority. I have a continuous check on all flightplans; occasionally makes things a little easier. But then, I have access to almost all information—a direct readout, in fact, on the General Network lines. Cost a mint."

A mint? Good God, a whole

mine!! A whole asteroid! Who is this bugger?

As if to answer: "Have you ever heard of STRONZO?"

She felt suddenly ill. Her head managed to nod.

Gold grinned widely. "Wonderful! Then you know who I am—I mean, if you've got any brains at all." That grin stayed, like a fixed leer, like lockjaw.

"I know," Sal whispered. "STRONZO—the interstellar Crime Syndicate, the universal incarnation of sickness and evil."

"For a *pirate*—" he spoke the word slowly, relishing each syllable, letting it sink in—"you are terribly moral. You shouldn't attach moral values to business."

She shook her head violently. "I don't, I don't. I can already see my neck in your lousy collar. Believe me, I'm no moralizer. God, I'm no moralizer."

Gold smiled.

Insterstel was *very* unhappy about Piracy.

Sal looked at the thin man with empty, resigned eyes. "I guess you're the one they call The Inheritor."

"The twenty-second grandson of Howard Hughes," Gold boasted; "entrusted with all the accrued property of the Hughes Empire, form the original nest-egg of Las Vegas to the asteroid Midas. Every penny, every dyne, every hit-man is mine." His cheeks were red, full of blood and dreams. Red as a wicked lust.

"I own it all," he said. Then,

after a pause: "I own you, too."

Sal blanched.

"If you don't do what I want . . .?" There wasn't any need to finish the sentence.

"Then what do you want?" Sal sighed. It had been too good to last anyway.

"Some of your time," said Gold, and reached into the desk.

WHEN HIS HAND came out, it held nothing but a few glossy flat-prints. "Do you recognize what's going on here?"

She studied the pictures for a second. "It looks like . . . Christ, like a junkie shooting up. The first one, I mean. The second one is, uh, some kind of pornography. Not very good, at that. I've seen better bodies in the Morgue."

"There are many, many better bodies than that," said the speculator. There was something greedy in his voice.

"The third one I don't know what to make of. It looks like something vaguely clinical . . . like a picture of a man in the initial stages of Cholera, or drug-withdrawal." She looked up at Gold. "Are they related?"

"Like whores and syphilis, my dear. Those pictures were taken in sequence, about two days apart each. Can you guess what the relationship there is?" His narrow face was flushed.

Sal could guess, but preferred not to. Certain guesses are obscenities—almost as obscene as the truth they guess at. "You tell

me.”

Gold looked down at the pictures laid out on his transparent desk. “Those are photographs, purely clinical photographs, not in the least intended for public sale or promotion, which show a couple in the three stages of intoxication and withdrawal induced by the drug *Homosol*. I imagine you know what *Homosol* is.” A grin, exposed shark-teeth.

“It’s an aphrodesiac.” Sal’s bald statement concealed knowledge, not ignorance. *Homosol* was an addictive and a specific aphrodesiac. It amplified sexual sensitivity by a bright magnitude. Anyone who used the drug was addicted to it—and to the *individual* with whom he subsequently fornicated. He became hypnotically fixated upon one being—and when the drug’s trance-state was brought back, only that person could satisfy the implanted hypnotic urge. It was a conditioned response: remove it, and the victim will die. The drug was one of a family of psychochemicals that had been banned, without exception, a hundred years before.

Totally habit-forming; stop taking it at three-day intervals, and you died. Like a poisoned rat, but more slowly.

“What else do you know about *Homosol*?” said Gold. His voice was soft, thin, almost didactic. Like a weary college professor who’s been through the routine a thousand times.

“It’s illegal.”

“Is that all?”

“It—it *stinks*!” She jumped out of her chair and ran for the door. But when she reached it, it wasn’t there.

Gold, took his hand out of the desk. “We are completely locked in, my dear; I’m afraid you have *no* way out of this.” He sat down. His face was calm, fixed in a smile like a dolphin’s beak.

“Sit down. You *cannot* escape—not from this room, not from this situation. Not, ever, or until I choose, from *STRONZO*. You can treat this as a trap, or as a dangerous opportunity. I suggest the latter, since despair will certainly kill you. You have only two choices: do what I tell you, and reap the rewards that will fall—rewards, for you, in excess of 10 billion Kwattouri—or refuse to do what I tell you . . . and wind up a victim of Interstel’s rather casual form of justice. Whatever you decide to do, you are a pawn; pawns are cheap, and it’s easy to get another where you came from. You just happened to be convenient, and somewhat experienced in this, ah, line of work. Now what is your choice—pardon me, your decision?”

10 billion KWH! “I guess I’ll cooperate. Even if it kills me.”

“Even if it kills you,” repeated Gold. He produced a sheet of paper with neat printing on it. “This is a contract—not in the strict business sense, but in the

STRONZO sense. A contract for death. Don't look so surprised—even the Mob has to keep some sort of formal records. Otherwise, we'd lose track of half our activities." His finger jabbed down at the bottom of the sheet. "Sign right there. Your signature proves your recognition of the contract, and its subsequent clauses and catches. It makes you, basically, a member of STRONZO. And obliges you to behave in a STRONZOLIKE way. Now—" he moved his finger up two centimeters "—if I put *my* signature *there*, that completes the contract. Completing the contract, if you'll read line twenty-five, results in abnegation of all STRONZO's obligations . . . and your immediate liquidation. You'd become a sort of 'Liquid Deficit.' In this case, all we need to do to kill you is turn over certain information to Interstel, and they'll do the manual labor for us. Otherwise, we have the Company method . . ." His voice dribbled away. It was a binding contract, obviously.

Sal signed numbly.

"Excellent!" chirped Gold. He folded the contract and put it in the desk.

"Aren't you going to punch it into the Computer?" Sal asked.

"No. The terms of the contract read, if you bothered to read them, that upon completion of the Assigned Task, the Contract is void, and will be destroyed. Then you can resume being—" the corners of his mouth twitched "—a

Nice Girl."

Honor among thieves, Sal wondered, or the theft of Honor?

Gold the speculator smiled a thin smile.

THERE WAS a planet named *Juarez*, which had a small moon *Teejay*, and one moderately large city, *Brothel*.

" . . . A den, as it were, of vice and iniquity," Gold explained.

Sal moistened her thin lips.

"A veritable emporium of Sin."

She giggled.

"A ravishing fleshpot."

A small muffled giggle.

"I'm sure you'll enjoy it. The problem will be getting the stuff off the planet. There are certain people who must be located, once you're there, but that's no problem. Juarez is the only planet in known space where the weed *Homostag* can grow; some subtle idiosyncrasy of the local soil or weather or something. Of course, it's all they *do*—grow the drug, I mean. The sexual jazz is just a clumsy front, a rickety facade. The real industry of this world is Junk—every sort of Junk, for every sort of Junkie. It's all they think about, all they know about, all they care about."

"What happens when we get it back?" Sal asked. She didn't care, but it seemed a nice question to fill the conversation void.

"We shall synthesize it. Its structure is unknown—and the drug has never been seen in this part of space. Once we know the

structure, we can build some isomer that can be sprayed through the air. We'll use it in our prostitution operations, to insure an avid market. Like planned obsolescence—the customer has to come back so he can leave again."

Sal's stomach churned; nausea crept slowly up her gullet.

Gold's eyes were far away, happy.

"What about my credit card?" Sal demanded.

Gold showed glittering teeth in a viper's smile. "You're holding it in your hand."

"I am?"

"Give the calling card to me."

She handed him the card, looking sullenly puzzled.

"Watch." He picked at the card's edge with a long thumbnail. A corner of plastic peeled up, then the whole surface curled back, to reveal—

"My credit card!" squealed Sal.

If she had used a microscope to examine a tiny spot of—ink? dirt?—in the upper-left corner, she'd have vanished without a story. That seeming point of dirt was a stenciled computer circuit which, to the Credit Network, said:

Unlimited Credit!

2.

FROM SPACE, Juarez was dull. Its sun was dull—a diffuse red superblob with a tiny point of yellow brilliance-squinting out of the

middle, a jewel in a turd. Juarez was far, far from the murky, seething surface of the star, but it's ruddy glow suffused the lethargic grey sky over a forty-degree arc, like a gigantic sunset cloud shining from unreal refracted light. The real guts of the star were buried under millions of miles of nebulous gas, which filtered light and heat until what warmth seeped into space to warm the ruling worlds was tepid and diluted. The planets huddled as close as they could, but not close enough for comfort. The natives were a pale, cold race, given to involved customs and rituals, and run-on sentence structures. It helped to kill time.

It had a moon: Teejay was like nothing so impressive as a bladderstone. Nobody wrote songs about Teejay; it was mined and wormed like a rotten fruit, and not pretty. The sun's shivering rays cast a blood-thick light upon it that caused a faint nausea if you looked at the satellite too long. A spoiled pomegranate, no legends in it.

The lonesome, almost autistically solitary city of Brothel was a patch of slightly necrotic green fungus in a vague yellow desert. White, maggot-like ships crawled up and away from it, into the tired leaden sky with such slothful casualness that you'd have thought they were in no big hurry to leave. Actually, the low gravity made high acceleration unnecessary; captains took their time; the

crews were usually drugged, stoned, zonked or otherwise indisposed anyway, and it was wise to be cautious. The cargo was poison—poison to the mind, poison to the heart—and the root of many an epitaph.

Sal's ship landed with a mild bump, so she needed no epitaph. Just a tranquilizer and a beer. She got the tranquilizer.

Then had to wait in Customs.

At some length (we skipped that part), Sal made it out to the streets. It was dusk, a red and foggy dusk, with the bloated sun peeping like a bloodshot voyeur eye over the western edge of the shrunken world, and she could hardly see. There were people, after a fashion. They were tall and thin, less-than-fiendish mantis people who wanted little to do with her.

And, yes, there were buildings. They loomed, toppling radio-towers. In the low-G the buildings, once gaudy, tawdry pleasure-castles, were now nothing more than heaps of rusted tinsel, angular and ugly. The red glare wove among them in streams of pallid twilight, slanting through ruined facades like shining threads in a rotted tapestry, glowing diffused wisps among the tarnished skeletons. Sal walked in a demon's dream.

For a few Waseci, a boy-shape showed her to lodging.

On thin mattresses, she slept.

Dawn was a red flower.

Sal left the hostel, to roam

crooked streets. Noon's light was not much brighter than dusk's, but she could see where her paths led. A night's twisted sleep had cleared her head; she knew where to begin her search for the horror-drug Homosol:

In the nearest bar.

The 'Keep was short, for his kind, and fat (for his kind), "Shot o' Double Doom?" he gasped. They spoke *inhaling*, not *exhaling*. It was hard to take.

"A *double* shot of Double Doom, whatever that is, and some information."

He poured the double shot. "Informations cost you triple shot of Double Doom." He winked with his lower lids squeezing together. Like labia winking together, hard.

She shelled out. "I'd like to know—"

Her eyes went glassy as quartz; her body turned rigid as a hard-on love; her hand gripped the glass with infamous strength. The Double Doom took strong hold . . . and relaxed. Sal died for a minute-plus.

"You shouldna took a double shot of Double Doom," sucked the barkeep.

"Never mind," she gagged, and strutted out the door like a wrong-way robot.

Things spung in slowly diminishing arcs; settled down finally to shimmer and roll like suggestive cowboy-movie Saloon Girls in bunny costumes. She groped for orientation.

Grabbed a greaser by the arm. "Jus' lemme hold on a moment."

Blithered the greaser, "Whi'yore at it, how you wanna fucka my seester?"

Sal reeled on. "I don' wanna fucka your seester, meester, or for that matter your mother, brother," The streets began, with painful slowness, to congeal. (To herself, she weighed the attractiveness of his offer . . . but decided she probably wasn't very attractive.)

Gradually sanity took hold. "What I'd really like," breathed Sal hoarsely, "is a little information."

"Cost you triple Double Doom."

Financial transaction.

"Uh," she began softly, "where can I get some, uh, drugs." Her voice was a lizard's hiss.

The native frowned: a rude fork-tongue lashing the air (ghost whips flailing; red squints of pain/pleasure arcing lightning). "Whot you say?"

"Drugs!" Sal spat, looking over her shoulder at a loitering cop. "Dope. Junk." Shifty paranoid eyes.

"Ooh-h-h—*drogs!*" screamed the mex-type. "*Drogs!* ees whot you wants! Why dint you *saaayy* so?!"

"Aak," aaked Sal. "Gaak."

"I kin git you *drogs anee* place!" He grabbed her arm and started to pull her along garbage-strewn streets. The cop snored peacefully.

"We gotta keeps up appearances," sniggered the skink, "or else Juarez weel lose its beeg reputation. Thas why I fed you that line about my seester. Actually my seester is a—" he looked around nervously "—respectable gorl."

They walked through a seedy archway, a vestige of some Empire that had ruled the world before spaceflight and colonization had ruined the newer culture that ruined the arch. Its age, Sal thought, exceeded three thousand years, yet it was a common piece of rubble: a necessary evolutionary step, the concrete arch, through which all the worlds' armies must march. Beyond the Arch of Nihil a broad plaza unfolded, surrounded by pillars without roofs, walls without rooms, floors without feet, a mausoleum erected by ghosts. The sucking mouths of the natives were gurgling whispers here; silence was a wind; history was a zombie parade.

Flagstones beneath their feet, patterns of light and shadow.

They passed through another arch, now crumbled debris, and into the corpselight streets of the living.

And came, after much winding and weaving, to a bar.

In archaic letters: THE AUGUST PUBLIC HOUSE OF THE VENERABLE ANCIENTS' & THEIR MINIONS & STUDENTS—

Double Doom 50 ws

If You Survive Three, the

Fourth's On the House.

The skink led her in. The light was concentrated gloom, and Sal's pupils slow to dilate. When they did, she saw a long, nearly empty bar with a few tall bottles of murky liquid standing at one end. The traditional mirror across from the bar was caked with oily soot, almost opaque. The people in this pub had seen enough of their own faces.

"Just a moment," gulped the skink. "I call the owner. She's usually in back, curing the Stuff."

Sal's neck tingled as the wog emitted a supersonic shrill.

A shape came sliding through a doorway beside the farther wall. At first she couldn't define it. . . . when she did, her stomach heated up in nausea.

Fat. You wouldn't use that word for most of them. But this lizard was an exception; tall, as tall as them all, but with a retching deformity. Was it cancer, Sal wondered, or an incredible obesity? The shape shifted its bulk into sharper light. Now the deformity was obvious. . . . Sal turned away.

There were really two of them—stuck together. A kind of siamese catastrophe, joined at the neck and branching into two unbalanced bodies. One of the bodies walked slightly stooped, because the other was shorter. They shared a single head, but all else was in duplicate. Two torsos, two sets of spindily legs, two pair arms . . .

Two female genitals.

"I see why you called her 'she,'" Sal choked.

The nig put a fond arm around one of the grotesques' shoulders. Like embracing a hideous grey spider. "Sure! You bets she's a She. Best She inna business. Queer Sal, this here is the oneanonly Duplicate Dolly Dammitall, the best hashfixer an' skag-curer inna world—or off it!"

Sal forced herself to extend a shaking hand.

Fingers clutched at it. Then let go.

"Sal's lookin' for Dope," the native explained.

The mouth opened and shut, like insect mandibles, sideways. "What kinda dope, honey? Good grade or poor?"

"I don't think it's the kind of stuff you ordinarily deal in," Sal said. "It grows right here, on this planet, but it needs offworld chemlabs to bring out the rich, vital goodness. I believe it's a seventeen step procedure, simply to catalyze away part of the enzyme—"

"Enzyme drugs are hard to get ahold of," interrupted Duplicate Dolly-Dammitall, "but I can get practically anything."

Sal looked her up and down nervously. "This is a special case."

"How special?"

"Special enough to attract the tender attentions of Interstel."

Duplicate Dolly laughed: like drowning children. "Interstell! Who let you in on that lie?"

"They're looking for me—but not here."

"Not anywhere! Interstel is just a goddamn *lie* the local fuzz makes up to scare the jaydees. There ain't no such thing, honey, and if there were, Dolly Dammitall would protect you from it!" Both bellies shook.

Sal tried another tack. "The drug—"

"What drug?" gurgled Dolly.

"Homosol," Sal blurted.

The room was silent. A wind like warm breath sagged through the open door.

"Homostag I *might* be able to get you—but Homosol? Never! The Stuff is too hot, too big to fool around with. You'd have to deal with the Government just to get any info on it, and even then I doubt that you could actually *buy* any—you might get a license to use it on rats, if you're a big-shot technic, but they'd never let you *buy* anything." She rubbed her cleft chin. "What do you want with that junk, anyway?"

"I'm buying some for a friend."

"Oh. Well, I won't be nosy about it." Dolly slipped behind the counter, walking on a bias, like a dog. "Have one while we're talking things over?"

Sal settled for a quarter-shot of Double Doom.

After she died, Sal said, "Just how far is the Government into this? I mean, do they control the drugs, dispense them, or just look the other way and take payoffs?"

Dolly giggled. "Honey, the

Government isn't any Government. It started out as a Terry cartel, back before colonization got discouraged by exploiters exploiting the exploiters. This place was run by, shall we say, the Criminal Element, only it turned out not for a profit. They took a loss, and pulled out. Leaving, I'm afraid, their Juarezi flunkies to run the show—I mean, who else *was* there, considering that the original ruling body was dissolved by Terry fiat and native idiocy? After two hundred Terry years of Big Brother type government, we just didn't know anything else. So we let the Criminal minds who screwed things up to begin with continue to screw things up. It gives us something to complain about—and keeps the Organization Mench off our backs. Who wants a strong central government, anyway?"

Certainly not Sal. "So who runs the drug trade?"

"Everybody! It's all we do! This planet, its entire economy, subsists—hell, luxuriates!—entirely on a basis of drugs, drug peddling, drug dealing, drug scheming, drug exploiting, drug pandering, drug advertising, drug promoting, drug marketing, drug developing, drug experimenting, drug researching, drug worshipping, drug highs, lows, intermediates, and ambiguities. And of course, drug bans; without them, we'd starve." Both her monstrous bodies shuddered.

"Sounds vaguely like Los

Angeles," Sal mused.

"What planet is that?" said Dolly.

"It's not a planet—it's a city. Forget about it. All I want—"

A cop ambled through the door. Sal instantly froze. Dolly seemed pleased; she grinned an alien grin, and beckoned the officer in. "Have a couple on the house!"

The policeman did so. He wiped his harelips, and said, "How much this week?"

"Business secret," Dolly bubbled.

The cop chided her playfully. "Comon, how much?"

"Well . . . seeing as how I'm among friends—about eighty thousand Kwattouri."

The cop whistled supersonically. "After taxes?"

"You never know . . . but I imagine about fifty grand."

The cop belched a laugh. "You never know about the taxes. The collectors can get rough."

Dolly's pinch-faced head nodded. "They aren't on a straight take, like you boys." She thrust a wad of bills at him. "Sometimes they can extort half your profits, and demand a retainer on next week's; I've even heard of them getting advances for an entire month—and comming back the very next week!"

The cop nodded knowingly. He got up to leave.

"Take it easy," Dolly called. He was out the door.

The freak-woman turned to Sal.

"That's the local constabulary. He gets a steady twenty-five Kwattouri per week from everybody in the neighborhood. Good boy, never gives nobody no trouble." She drained a beerstein. "Keeps the patrons safe from the god-damn jaydees, too."

In alcohol-diluted amazement, Sal watched the cop amble out the door; she turned to Dolly. "Who . . . or what . . . gets the Ultimate Percentage? I mean, who's the Grand Thug of this place?"

Dolly said. "That's a State Secret, but for a small price . . ."

Financial exchange.

" . . . for a small price," she continued, stuffing a small bill between her left pair of bosoms, "I might be an Informed Source. That is, I might be willing to impart certain knowledge without which you'd find things rather difficult around here." She winked, a hideous thing to watch. "What's your poison?"

Sal thought the question over. "Well, I suppose what I want is a processed vial, or even a few molecules, of the wonder drug Homosol. In its final processed form. And it seems you are not able to get me any."

"Correct," slurred Dolly.

"And so," Sal went on slowly, "it might help things to go directly to the top. To the Man In Charge."

"Das rite," put in the skink.

"And since everything around here is run by either the Mob,

which is the government, or by the Government, which is really the Mob—well, I'd do best in dealing directly with the Man. I mean, the Man who runs the Mob that runs the Government, or the Government that runs the Mob." She nibbled her lower lip.

"Good idea," chorused both Dolly and the mex.

"And who is that man?" Sal said, her bony face frowning in an attempt at pouting. "I mean, is it the Man who runs the Government that runs the Mob, or the Man who runs the Mob that runs the Government?" Her voice was near breaking. "Or both?"

"That's another State Secret," said Dolly, "and it'll cost you another couple of bills." Sal forked over. "Very cooperative girl, destined for great things. Now, as to this second matter, the answer is simple: *He's* not a *they*, he's just a *he*. There is only one Mr. Beeg, and since you have already paid, I shall give you his name . . ." And Dolly bent low and whispered conspiracies in Sal's ear.

Her aluminum-grey eyes went wide. "How do I get to see him? I thought he was dead! I—"

Dolly silenced her. "You see Mr. Beeg the same way you get to do anything else: you pay. And it'll be plenty."

Sal looked in the cuff of her shiny black thigh-boots. "I've only got about a hundred-thousand KWH in change."

"That's a lot of change; don't go

flashing it around—the jaydees would love to put you on a diet. But it's not nearly enough. Do you have a credit card?"

Sal fished again in her boot. She yanked out a rectangle of shiny plastic. "Yeah, here it is, but I don't know how much is in my account."

Dolly lifted it from her fingers. "We'll see." She slid the plastic square into a Network Bank read-out.

The digital display read:
∞ KWH.

"How much is that?" asked Sal. Her face was a curious emptiness.

"E-eeeeee!—Quite enough, my dear lady, quite, quite e-nuff!"

3.

TEEJAY WAS a pale blob in the red sky. From space, the citadel of the Bankers of Juarez seemed harmless, benign almost, like a great granite egg about to plop into the hazy surface of its many craters blurred and rounded to hillocks and humps, blandly inconspicuous. The satellite was like many: a syndical cartel in name, and a capitalistic tyranny in fact. Designated a People's Republic in some musty, dusty, busty bygone past, it had rapidly degenerated from marxist nobility to a greedy free-for-all of cutthroat competition . . . in which the Workers found life no Paradise, but a petty hell of quadruplicate forms and mobius-reels of red tape. Avarice ruled this moon, avarice and time.

It was just like any other place: you could get anything for a price.

The shuttle came swiftly down; it was swallowed; the woman debarked and descended.

Sal stared in frank wonder at the man confronting her.

He was tall—but the legends told that. And he was thin—but the legends said that, too. And very slight, and the stories were right about that. He didn't weigh more than 40 kilos, spread butter-thin over a two-meter frame. His torso was a gilded bird-cage of ribs, his arms like frail insect limbs, his legs too long for a body too thin.

He was supposed to be dead.

"How much are you willing to pay?" asked the myth-figure in a voice too nasal and tense.

"I haven't even said what I *wanted* yet," Sal quavered. "I haven't even sat down."

"Sit." He wasted no words. "And state your price."

Sal bit her lip to prevent a scowl. Dolly Dammitall had warned her not to let on about the unlimited credit. Sal had been on the verge of running, leaving this hell for another, better one, but—

"What will they do to you if you don't come up with the Stuff?" Dolly had warned.

Kill me, Sal knew. So here she was.

"Time is money," exclaimed the Legend. "A great deal of it. So please, state your wish and I'll

Genie it—or have you tossed out an airlock." He sat behind an immaculate desk, as immaculate as the Holy Conception. Nothing, it was obvious, had ever deflowered its mirror surface, not even the petal of a dandelion. It was clean, uninvolved with its owner, as clean as the Virgin on her back, with her pale legs kicking.

Evil just passed around it.

Sal cleared her throat. "I'd like to buy some of the drug Homosol."

The thin man was not visibly upset. "Why do you want to purchase that drug?"

Sal tried to think of some evasion, some mis-directing question of her own, but her wits failed her. "My uh, employer," she stutted at last, "my employer wants the drug."

"May I ask who your employer is?" said the bony figure.

Sal shook her head. "He doesn't want his Identity revealed."

"Why not?"

"Because . . ." she stammered in confusion, "because he's—well, he's eccentric and unorthodox."

The man across the barren desk stared at her levelly. His eyes were cold and brown, with small irises set in yellow, ichor-like puddles, mathematical, computing. Thin eyebrows arched over them . . . and almost never fluttered. There was no emotion here. The room became very quiet . . . as quiet as a city sunk in rock so deep that the rock was

nearly plastic, warm magma.

"What do you mean, 'unorthodox'?"

Sal wet her lips. "Well, he operates outside the normal trade-routes."

A hair-narrow eyebrow lifted one millimeter.

"I—I mean," Sal stammered, "he's not exactly the usual businessman." She blinked furiously, water diluting her vision as emotion began to churn.

The stranger (*he's thinner than a coffin*, Sal's mind whirled) put a longish cigarette to his blue lips. He seemed to pull it out of nothing, like a magician extracting bunnies from a bottomless tophat. The effect was not comical. A flame came out—of his finger?—and lighted the reefer. The smoke was blue and acrid, poisonous lye.

"In what way is he not the usual businessman?" he said.

Sal gave up. "He's a criminal."

The thin man grinned faintly. "So?"

"He's an operative—of STRONZO."

Both the stranger's eyebrows shot up like wild rockets. The cigarette dropped out of his open mouth (rows of gold teeth) and rolled across the immaculate surface of the desk shedding ashes and filth. "God!" he swore in a corpse's rattling voice. "Those bastards haven't been seen in this part of space in a hundred years! What gives them the right—" He stopped and tried to compose

himself. "Just what was his name? Your boss's name?"

Sal's heart thudded in her chest. "He's called the Inheritor."

The thin man reddened, like a ripening genital. "His *name*!"

Sal spat it out. "Victor E. Gold, speculator."

The man stood up. Now Sal could see the strangeness of his dimensions. His legs were freakishly long and thin, stretched by the years in low gravity to strings of bone and threads of weak sinew; his hands were huge, clawing the air like ravenous spiders; his neck—like a turkey's neck, with a wattle drooping down from the lined and poultry-red throat; his arms were octopoid, almost boneless tentacles black tendrils of hollow appetite; and the face was a furious mask.

He's old! Sal gasped in an inward scream, *he's-old old old!* Older than the trilobite or the worm, an archeozoic evil.

He crossed the room like a wisp of gas and wrapped his spider fingers around her neck in an uncompromisingly strong clutch. "You are telling me the truth—you are?"

She stared into the enraptured face of hatred. "I am, so help me God, I am!" The oath seemed appropriate.

His eyes and hers grappled together in a profane coitus of the mind. They saw the mutual truth.

He let her go.

"How much?" she said. Her voice was a blank page.

He was back behind the desk, staring at nothing. "Let me think." No rumor had ever had him saying that before. The legend he was said to be needed no thought, only computations and logic. His was a legend of a Machine, of a robot, not a legend of flesh. He was a legend without weaknesses. But now he needed to think.

He thought. The minutes ticking passed.

Finally he looked at her (the cold visage of vacuum), and said: "100 billion Kwattouri." He looked down at the cigarette staining his desk. Then away. He didn't care anymore.

Sal walked to the wall. The blank white surface was broken by only one small thing: a Network slot and readout.

She shoved in her card. Punched out the quantity.

DATA IN, said the readout.

DATA PROCESSED, it blinked.

DATA COLLATED AND STORED, flashed the light.

"I put the money in your account," Sal said flatly. "It's been accepted without any difficulty."

The thin man nodded his black head absently. "I'll see that you get what you deserve. One of my men will give you the stuff." He fell into silence for a moment. Then looked at her for the first time.

"Leave," he said.

Sal walked through the opening door.

All alone in the sterile room,

breathing in calmly measured silence, a legend, a myth schemed serene schemes of murder.

4.

SPACE WAS an endless tunnel. Stars spun in aimless circles, forming a cylinder of streaking light around the ship. At the distant end of this tunnel was a bright golden star, a point of light magnified and amplified by the twists of time and space that drove the vehicle onward, onward through bright depths. Suns streaked past her like phosphorous tracer-bullets careening down into the ultimate black hell. Night was no flapping wing, but a wheeling, whirling madness, a psychedelic kaleidoscope, a billion burning eyes. A million spinning sunsets beckoned, a trillion mornings waved. Light, light, light; needles of color and sabers of luminous night. The spectacle of God's arena, where the gladiator of dawn wrestles the lion of midnight, and loses to their duplicate glory.

She read a book.

Otherwise she might have seen the blips closing in towards the sweeping center of her neutrino-radar. The hornets closing in on the tarantula. They'd been tracking her, following her spoor of shattered cherenkov atoms, and now the scent was like carrion in the electronic nostrils, like dead and putrid meat. Their metallic mandibles drooled laser saliva, searching, hunting, a black twitch-

ing scavenger nose snuffling at blood-drenched shit.

Unlimited credit had been handy: she'd bought the former police ship at an exorbitant price. Now she flew it, for a more exorbitant price.

Through empty space that was less than empty.

The hunters spread out, into a net formation.

She drove ahead, blindly.

A voice on the communicator:

"This is an agent of Interstel. Stop all acceleration immediately. Repeat . . . this is an agent of Interstel. I am prepared to destroy your ship and crew—for transporting illegal and nefarious contraband material within Interstel's protective dominion. Repeat: you are trapped. You can never escape. Please surrender or be destroyed."

The voice repeated itself metronomically. Sal glanced at the radar panel, and then flipped off the voice. She yelled into the mike:

"Screw you bastards! I've got something you ain't!" The ship had been a police cruiser, used by planetary governments for customs and arbitrary enforcement. It had an oversized lithium-fueled, helium-catalyzed fusion reactor which could vomit up a billion killowatts, if required. She pulled out the throttle . . . a digital display showed the increase . . .

And rocketed ahead.

The jackals shot ahead, too. She

poured on more juice. The G-coils warmed slightly. Gravity fields gripped her, by every atom, and hurled her ahead without perceptible strain. The stars' light twisted as if in agony.

"You're really giving us a bad time," droned the voice as Sal flipped on the speaker again. "You really think you can ever escape?" The voice took on an oddly cosmic, resonating quality, as if the infinitely distant skies were reverberating with its hollow words.

"Honestly, Sal, why do you try, why do you try at all? You know that, someday, even though it be the distant and dogeared future, you shall perish. If not at our hands, than surely at the hands of some other fate . . . perhaps slowly, in agony, or fast, in a puff of expanding gas. This is really all so foolish. You obviously haven't thought things over too well."

The voice paused, as a speaker in deep thought will do. Then, with an air of profound revelation, as though it had just now tripped on some great and subtle banana-peel of truth, the far-off, now almost sibilant voice said:

"It doesn't, in the end, make any difference what you do, whom you know, how you think. It doesn't matter if you rot like a pool of vomit, or rise like a bursting star. Death is at the end of every path."

Then silence.

Sal shuddered in the throes of some deep chill. Her quivering

lips mumbled for a second, then spoke in the direction of the mike. "What the hell do you want?"

The voice came back strong and confident. "We want that vial of Homosol. We want it *now*, without any goddamn questions, not even a bloody rotten peep. We want it enough to kill you and blast your ship. We want it. We need it. We are going to get it."

Sal stared into starry nothings. Without looking, she punched out a random course change; the ship began to gyrate wildly, dragged along by a randomly twisting and warping G-field.

The pursuing pack followed like delicate ballerinas, in perfect synch. They were locked on, they moved as one.

Sal cursed; the voice chuckled: like grinding shards of ice.

"You can't get away."

No.

"All right," Sal sighed defeatedly "Come and get me."

HE WAS what you'd expect: tall, angular, all elbows and arms, with the sneaky evasiveness of a switchblade. He was dressed in a maroon shirt, some sort of synthetic material that wrenched light inside out, and made it glow of its own. His pants were black plastic, thickening without seams into jackboots with platinum buckles. A holster with useless jewels and an entirely functional gun, a carbon-black penis. Sal knew the type:

Swashbuckler.

"There's a sucker born every second," said the pirate. "And you got the lucky second. Now where's the Homosol? If you won't tell us—" he leered "—we'll search everywhere."

She glared at him red-eyed. "You can shove it up your ass!"

"Say!" beamed the pirate. "Not a bad idea. I think that's where we'll start looking—up your ass, I mean!"

"I'm not stupid enough to try that trick!"

"Looks can foolya."

She pouted unprettily. "My looks are none of your goddamn business." She was being consumed by illogic, wallowing in dense soups of emotion; this was the first—second?—time in her life she'd ever been caught. Second if you counted Gold. But the humiliation threatened to become constant. She did not wish to endure a lifetime of self-disgust and self-reprisals.

She *had* to escape—and cost was no barrier. Cost was completely out of her mind.

She jerked around from her down-cast pose to grapple the pirate's eyes. "Maybe I've got something you'd like more than the Junk."

The pirate toyed with her. "Maybe you do, but I can't imagine what it might be. Gold, maybe, or pretty jewels?" His grinning teeth were osmium-alloy gold, with diamond edges. Rubies and emeralds studded them like

rabbit-feces on a newspaper.

"Not any of that shit," Sal sneered. "My 'looks' really have fooled you. No, I've got something you want, something you'll want, when I tell you what it is, more than you want the Homosol. Something that I never even heard of until I saw it, and even now find damned hard to believe. Only it's real—real as whips."

The pirate scratched his stubbled chin. "What? I give up."

She felt around in her boot. The pirate leered obscenely. Her fingers curled around a slip of plastic, and she pulled it out swiftly. The cabin lights made it look like a scrap of trash, a long-used 100 Wattouri bill, tattered and worn. She held it in front of him, teasing.

"Well, what is it?" He swiped at it, but the leathery woman snapped it out of reach.

"Look at it!" she snarled with sudden command. "Look at it!"

The pirate stared dully. "So what? A lousy credit card. I've seen a million of 'em. They're useless to me; you can't cash in on 'em, because the Network would have you located in a second, and the cops would be on your ass in two seconds. Put it away."

But Sal had his eye. "Here," she ordered. "Put it into the readout—use the neutrino beam!—now look at the amount in the screen, at my credit account!" ∞ KWH.

He stared at it the way a snake

ogles a fat mouse.

Only the mouse was the captor. "Now," said Sal, "you know that thing is useless to you. And you know that the minute anything happens to me, it becomes useless to anybody. And you know that it's worth—hell, it's worth the whole frigging Galaxy!" She was herself only groping towards an awareness of the thing she held in her hand. Its worth was impossible to estimate—as impossible to estimate as the value of the human Galaxy. But also impossible to consider was the sum paid out to purchase it—the bribe it took to bribe one of the top officials of the Network Bank, when the object being bargained for was worth—infinity. The systemic infinity of the Network Bank, all its assets, *and a promise for everything else!* Unless . . .

Who owned the Network Bank?

Her brain fevered as she spoke. "This card is a billion fortunes—a trillion, any number you name. In theory, all the wealth and poverty of the Galaxy can be summoned by using this card. *Infinite credit!*—try to put that in round figures. Try to put it in square ones. It won't fit into any preconceived shape, no matter how you force it."

Frodo's ring.

The pirate slowly shook his head. "I don't know how you got it—I don't care. I wouldn't want to know." He looked at her with confusion and fear. "All I know is that that thing is nothing to me, a

slip of trash." He paused in thought. "And your Homosol is everything . . . everything."

"Think about it," she cajoled. "You can't have the credit card—but *you can name your price!!*"

And eat it! Sal laughed. *The thing is a rotten trap!*

The pirate knotted his eyebrows together, frowning. "How high can I go?"

"As high as you want." *The question is 'how long could you last!'*

At last he took his eyes off the screen and looked at Sal. "Suppose I ask—well, for everything?"

"Then, I suppose the credit Network would credit you with everything." *He's nibbling!*

"And if I just asked for some finite amount—say, a round couple of trillion?"

"Then I suppose you'd get it."

He chewed his lower lip. "There must be a catch."

This has got to look legit. "Well, there is, of a sort. You'd have to transfer my funds into your account—and that'd require that you had an account of your own, of course, and that that account was in your legal name—or one accessible to you." She hoped he'd take up the hint.

He did. "Well . . . I could put it into a numbered account—and withdraw it into my own at some later date. It would require an *ad hoc* code, a temporary holding-account, like a trust—"

A strike!

"—but I think we could arrange it. Give me the card."

She let him take it out of her limp hand. He walked the couple of meters to the slot and shoved the card in. Then he punched out the transfer, hiding the panel with his body so Sal couldn't see.

Let him play his games, she thought. Let him spring his own trap. I've got a feeling that every transaction on that card is absorbed right back into the memory, as if nothing had happened. God, what a swindle! Every dyne I've spent with that thing has been phony-credit counterfeit! Why didn't I catch on sooner?

The pirate was finished. He backed away from the panel like a deviate withdrawing from rape. Satiated, full.

"God!" he whispered. "Shivering naked God!"

5.

AS SHE approached Marx, alarms jangled from every corner. Sirens wailed like the unshrived damned. Vibration made the stars jingle in their sockets, made the yellow sun dance up and down like a little boy who has to take a pee.

Sal flipped the communicator switch. "What the hell is it? I'm trying to sleep."

"Interstell!" barked a raspy voice. "You're under arrest!"

"Oh, can it," she said. "I've heard that line five thousand times, now, and every time it's been a stupid lie. There's no

more an 'Interstel' than there is a bogeyman, so please go back down where you came from."

The voice was adamant. "This happens to *be* Bogeymann, Captain Richard P. Bogeymann, and if you don't lay alongside us immediately, I'll see you blasted into soggy marshmallow!"

She decided to cooperative. It might ease her headache. "Just a minute. I'm not decent, yet." She pulled on her leather tights. "Okay," she said, activating the visiscreen, "shoot."

The face in the screen was round as a mellon, with fat nigger-lips moving in befuddled uncertainty. "No, no, I'm not going to shoot quite yet. You haven't broken any of the Rules, yet. But just you try, and . . ." His voice trailed off in confused menace.

Sal looked at his lugubrious face with unconcealed contempt. "What in *hell* do you want?!" Her curlers were still tightly in place.

"Okay, okay, don't get mad. It's just that I have a job to do, and people are always trying to push me around, and I've got a wife and children, and—"

"What do you want?" she repeated.

"Ah, that's a rather direct approach," hinted the Interstel agent. "You certainly lack tact, I must say."

She closed her eyes. *It has to be a dream.*

"Why am I being detained?" she said after a long silence.

"Why?"

"Because," the voice and face orchestrated with rigorous logic, "because. Because you are breaking the Rules." One of the nigger-lips—the lower one, it seemed—began to tremble:

"What's wrong with breaking a few of the Rules?" Sal asked naively.

The round face flustered. "What's wrong?! what's wrong?! What kind of commie bitch are you, 'what's wrong'? You *know* what's wrong, whore, and you're just giving me a bad time with it!" The lower nigger-lip was now tightly righteous.

"Honestly!" Sal pleaded. "I don't! I thought rules were put there just so we could break them once in a while! I never thought anybody took them *seriously*."

The melon-head scowled a deep patriotic scowl. "I detest shirkers," it said. "I simply *hate* shirkers." The little beady eyes looked away in disgust and fear.

Sal gazed wistfully out at Marx, so close and yet, as it were, so very far. Its surface, laid out in simple patterns of grids and squares that the uncomplicated proletarian mind could easily grapple with, gleamed and shimmered under wooly clouds. Directly beneath her, a great white spiral wheeled grandly across the straitened landscape, adding a pretty blotch of chaos to the rigid communal patterns. Her eyes shifted to the horizon—where Lenin rose inevitably over the

round hump of the world. The moon was small, orange, not unlike the flushed and unhappy citrus face of the man in her visiscreen. She sighed, and looked back at him.

"You still haven't told me what in blazes you want."

He was still indignant. "You just have no *decency*!"

Her eyes flickered again out the window. Over the curving blue horizon, Mao rose to cast its flatulent, ugly shadow upon the teeming masses below. Its squinted crater-face seemed to leer directly at her; she felt prone to blame the mindless moon for all her troubles and woes. The little satellite swiftly passed out of sight, dashing around the other, darkened hemisphere of Marx on its eternal mission into nowhere. In a fibrillation, it was gone.

She sighed again. "Suppose I put it this way: is there anything I can do for you?"

The bureaucrat's face brightened: waxed fruit. "There certainly is! But don't you for a second think I'm vulgar enough to let on what it is."

"Why not?"

"Because. That would be Telling."

She felt engulfed by pettiness. She thought the whole Universe, with all its scrambling races and civilizations, was involved in a dark and sinister conspiracy against her.

At last inspiration trilled through her nerves. "Tell me—if

I guess what you want, will you let me know if I'm correct?"

The little bureaucrat smiled a blubbery smile. "Of course. That's part of the Rules!"

She cleared her throat, and prayed to a nearby star for guidance. "Would it be, you'll pardon the phrase, money?"

The round face nodded shyly. Its beady eyes turned down to coyly consider invisible feet; the fat lips spread in a little boy's smile. He seemed at peace, as though some wickedness had been dispelled from him after tedious ages of torment.

"I think," lisped his voice, "that bribes are in order."

Sal reached for her credit card.

VICTOR E. GOLD was jubilant. He demonstrated his jubilation by scowling, snarling and cursing.

"Bungler! You let those obscenity pirates get away with a trillion KWH in credits! You could have wiped us out."

"Well," said Sal, "I didn't wipe you out, because I figured out who owns the Network Bank—you! And all debts I incurred were summarily wiped out, nulled and voided, by the computer—as you have programmed the computer to do!"

Gold smiled crookedly. "You still aren't quite as stupid as I thought you were, but you're getting there. For one thing, if we owned or controlled the Network Bank, we wouldn't need to, ah, work for a living. But the problem

here is, if you'd stop and use your alleged brain for a second, that there is no *single* Network Computer—there is a single *Network*, but the components of that system are spread out over a volumetric radius of 500 light-years. If anyone wanted to re-program the 'Network Computer' you allude to, he'd have to travel to every telephone exchange on every planet and moon and frigging asteroid in the bleeding Galaxy! And we aren't that widespread—more's the pity."

Sal blushed. "But how do you—how did you—"

Gold waved a spidery arm. "Bribes, my dear, plain old bribes! Were you born yesterday?—no, don't answer that. I'm afraid of what the answer might be. But look—if you wanted to forge a check, but didn't have the artistic talent, the proper sense of balance and form necessary to get away with it, what would you do?"

"To get away with forging the check? Well, for one thing I could bribe the teller—cash a particularly huge check and give him a percentage."

"What if it was a machine?"

"Bribe someone who runs the machine."

He grinned viper fangs. "And if a machine serviced the machine?"

"Bribe the man who ran the machine that ran the machine. It could go on that way forever. But sooner or later, I'd find a weakness to exploit, and get the check

cashied."

The speculator's lips stayed curled at the corners. "Very acute. You know your basics." He paused to think. "But you don't know everything. This is a mechanical culture, with largely no weakness, or at best mechanical weaknesses. If you can find a weakness, that weakness can be exploited over and over until another, logical part of the machine catches on and changes the programming or the faulty logic. In this case, we used purely mechanical methods to exploit a purely mechanical mistake: the left memory bank didn't know what the right was doing. Or, simply put, there's a time-lag in information conveyal; within certain limits—incidentally, very similar to classical Heisenberg limits of physical Uncertainty—it is possible to take advantage of this slowness in information transfer. So, when your pirate friend—and I'm not certain you aren't lying—tries to cash in on his check, he may indeed hit the proverbial pot of jack; he may be lucky. But, just as easily, he may not be so lucky—he may try to use a portion of the Network that has already assimilated the information voiding our little trick.

"Of course, without a *diffused*, non-centralized network, we never could have pulled this off. A Central Computer would be easy to gimmick—and impossible to cheat. All the accounts would be stored in one place, and the

information of our chest would propagate instantaneously. As would the warrant for our arrest."

Sal frowned. "But couldn't you just as easily bribe, or even buy, the Network's top officials, in that case?"

"No," Gold explained slowly, "we couldn't. As the system stands now, there are no authorities to bribe; only machines to cheat, bollix, gimmick and mis-program. But if there were any such top officials—well, how could you 'buy' the controllers of all the Galaxy's wealth?"

Sal meditated glumly on this.

"So you see," finished Gold, "you screwed us up. According to the terms of our contract, which I shall presently destroy, you will have to forfeit 10% for Screwing Us Up." He waved the contract before her nose. "I'll have it put in your account," Gold snided.

"The hell you will," Sal barked like a seal. "I want every dyne in cash!"

And Victor E. Gold was forced to laugh.

IN THE BAR called, appropriately, *Dykes & Dolls*, sat a blondish, dishwatery young lady with only a first name. She perched atop her stool in wavering celebration, rocking with teary laughter, strained with joy and jaundice. Her wallet was full; her belly dissolved hearty food; her eyes blurred by drink and drought; her frame thin as an elvish bedframe. The barren skeleton of happiness

with high spirit and inaccessible hopes. She was unsurmountably drunk.

In good time, she passed out.
And was dumped in the street.
And robbed. . . .

AND SO the worlds of man, a thousand grime-encrusted jewels, gained another vice. Points of dim light from one end of human space to the other, separated by distances that made their light a pallid ghost of the past, became with near-imperceptiveness brothels, whore-towns, pimp-cities and buggerworlds. Trapped by their emotions, trapped by the biological and historical past, men squirmed and struggled and finally collapsed in helpless defeat. The mind cannot be escaped; it is as much a trap as the cruelest assemblage of wire, steel, and poison. As much a prison.

Men and women writhed together in lust and agony, slithering one over the other in the absurd ritual of love, of love's purchased analog. Certain persons made futile, slightly obscene gestures towards the righteous God of decency, praying in time-rotted terms of morality and compassion.

But the Mob controlled everything.

The public was satisfied, even if it refused to admit it.

The papers were full of sin.

They *wanted* it, after all. . . .

Without our vices, whom could we condemn?

—PG WYAL

H. L. GOLD

*H. L. Gold is probably best-remembered for having launched the prestigious career of **Galaxy** Magazine as its editor for that magazine's first decade. His contributions to our field have been infrequent in recent years, so it is with pleasure that we welcome his return with—*

THAT'S THE SPIRIT

illustrated by JOE STATON

ALL RIGHT, all right—stop shoving notes at me and I'll tell you why I'm here! I came here for sanctuary. Why? Just turn on the tape recorder and stand back!

Okay.

I went into the Pen and Ink Room of the Domestic Press Club and looked from table to table till I found the man I was there to see—old Warren Whitman, dean of the loyal opposition to whatever party was in power, the news analyst's news analyst.

With his white head down, he was staring at the glass in his hand as if it were a crystal ball. He used to preside over the big table, not laughing very much, but clearly enjoying his deanship. Now, though, he sat alone at a corner table, away from the other newsmen, unseeing, unhearing and very probably not caring. It worried and upset the other newspaper men, who had sent me to find out what was wrong. After all, I ran a medical column in the local tabloid. Yeah, I'm a doctor,

only I never practiced.

"Mind if I join you?" I asked twice, without getting an answer. Finally I shook his shoulder till he looked up, then pointed at the chair and myself.

"By all means!" he cried and stood up, his manners coming back in a rush. He pulled an earplug out of one ear and did something to his other ear, then sat down, after I did. "Let me think." He was silent for a moment. "Of course—you're Dr. Hutton of the *Morning Mouth*." He gave a poor little chuckle. "That's what we other newsmen call it," he explained.

I rewarded him with a contents-noted nod. I'd heard the feeble joke for five years, and couldn't work up even a small smile.

Old Whitman leaned back. "You can't be coming to me as a fellow journalist—we have nothing reportorial in common. Deduction: you're here as a physician. Correct?"

"Right," I said. At least his brain wasn't softening.

He put out his left wrist. "Pulse, 79, five less than my age, blood pressure, 139 over 80. Anything else?"

"That's a bad tic you've developed," I said.

He put in the earplug and did something to the other ear. "No more tic?" he asked, almost jovially.

"No more tic," I admitted.

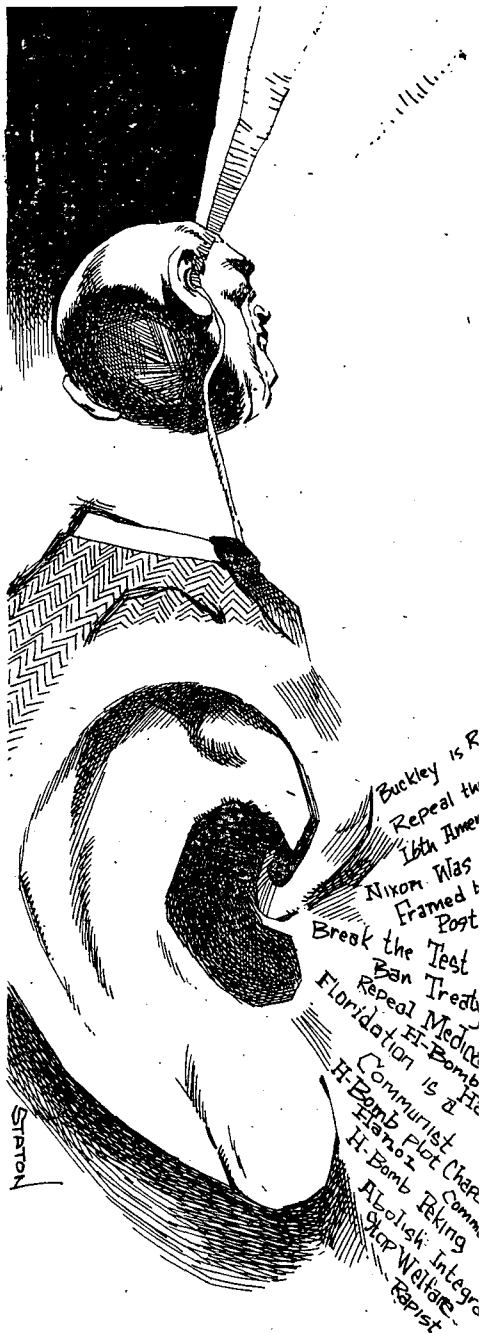
"I keep my little transistor radio on—loud—and my hearing aid in off position as much as possible," he said, pulling out the earplug and turning his hearing aid back on. "So would you, if you were I."

"Why would I?" I asked.

He said in a low, clear voice: "Because, I, Warren Whitman, dean of commentators, hear a voice. One voice. Inside my head." Before I could answer, he said, "One moment—I'm being inexcusably rude. Joe!" he called out to the waiter. Joe came over to our table. "What will you have, Doctor?"

"The usual, Joe," I said, and Joe looked at Whitman, who was noted for never taking a hard drink.

"I'll have a wet Martini," he said at last. "You know, half gin, half vermouth—sweet vermouth. Joe's trained face showed no expression, but mine must have, for Whitman explained to me—he was *always* explaining—"The formula of the original Martini, Doc-



tor, not the mouth-puckering, ulcer-provoking modern version.

He was about to go on with the Martini's history, but I cut him short. "About the voice and the hearing aid—" and I gestured at his ear and spread out my hand. He removed the thing and put it in my palm. I made as if to insert it in my ear and mouthed, "Okay?"

"Okay," he said, sliding forward eagerly, "Please do!"

So I did, and we held our breaths for a long moment. I took it out and shifted it to the other ear. I put it back in his hand, "Not a thing."

"I don't understand," he said, disappointed. As soon as he had the hearing aid inserted, his face, hands and body clenched. "Why didn't you talk while *he* wore it?" he demanded angrily. He listened, then turned to me. "Would you care to know his answer, sir?"

I nodded.

"Because I was assigned to you," he obviously quoted.

I sat in silence, wondering what to say or do. It isn't very often I'm stumped—in my medical column, at least—but I wished I'd had some practice, instead of going straight from interning to writing. A good, solid bedside manner was needed now and I had never had to develop one.

"Have you had the hearing aid checked out?" I asked. "It might be picking up a ham radio station."

"Of course I had it checked. It's picking up something far more upsetting than a mere mundane ham operator."

"Such as?"

He leaned toward me over his arms. "Before I tell you that, I want to know what *you* think I've stood for in the half-century that I have been doing what I term my job."

"Suppose you tell me," I evaded, like a psychiatrist turning back the question on the patient.

"All right, I shall." His famous forefinger speared me, as it had impaled thousands of lecture-goers. He used to be very big on the lecture circuit till age slowed him down. "I, Doctor, am a fighting liberal. Not a 'so-called quote liberal unquote.' I have fought every attack on the Constitution of the United States, from whatever side it emanated, Left as well as Right. I have given my long life to defending the Republic when it was correct and chiding it when it was wrong—and my chiding, sir, was most effective. As a fighting liberal, I am neither party's captive. Furthermore—"

"I know! I know!" I said. "I've read your column."

He took his arms off the table and sank back into himself. I felt guilty for having stopped him, but he was getting away from the subject again.

"More upsetting than a ham operator," I prompted. "Such as?"

"Such as—such as abolishing labor unions and outlawing

strikes! I, a founding father of the Newspaper Guild, am being told that by some nitwit whatever-it-is out of thin air!"

"Couldn't you be listening to your subconscious?"

"My subconscious be damned! I've been to every sort of mental specialist there is, and not one of them could explain why I hear this imbecilic voice when my hearing aid is on, and not when it is off. Can *you*?"

"Not if they couldn't," I said.

"Very well," he said belligerently. "I am also being told that Watergate was invented by the news media! I am being told to break the nuclear test-ban treaty, abolish Social Security, repeal Medicare—"

"Mr. Whitman! You must get a grip on yourself!"

"Yes, yes, I suppose I must." He subsided. "But there is so much more . . ."

"First a little rest, without talking, and a drink," I said.

He focused with some difficulty on the untouched glasses that Joe had brought us somewhere along the line. I waited till the old crusader had taken a hefty swallow, matched by one of my own, then said: "Repeal Medicare, you were saying."

"*And* repeal the Sixteenth Amendment—that's the income tax—*and* stop all immigration, turn over the TVA to private enterprise, and, of course, invade Cuba."

"Is that it?" I asked. "The

whole thing?"

He waved his age-spotted hand wearily. "Repeal fair employment, join China against Russia, then destroy China when Russia's out of the way—do I have to list them all?"

"No, no," I said in a hurry. "I get the picture."

In a way, it was funny, the dean of commentators, the news analyst's analyst, being fed this line—whether by his hearing aid, as he claimed, or his subconscious, as I believed—and I was sure the experts shared my opinion. People, including deans of commentators, don't go around hearing voices that aren't there unless they're sick in the head.

Meanwhile, old Whitman had been moodily putting away his wet Martini. Now he roused himself. "Do you know why I have to wear a hearing aid, despite the fact that my hearing is normal for a man my age?"

I shook my head, humoring him.

"Because, Dr. Hutton, *he* filled my ears with *ectoplasm*!"

I jumped to my feet. "Now that's too damned much!"

He pushed back his chair and stood up. "And do you know who is haunting me? I'll tell you—it's Harold M. N. Jones!"

"Gotcha!" I said. "Harold M. N. Jones isn't dead! He's in a coma, sure, but he's still alive!"

"That's right," said Whitman, sitting down slowly and carefully. "He has been in a coma since

April 29th. I had to buy my hearing aid four days later. And he has been getting stronger every day."

"Weaker, you mean."

"No, stronger. I can all but hear him now without my hearing aid. That makes sense, doesn't it, if you have been forced against all logic to believe in ESP because a dying man inhabits your cranium?"

"It doesn't make sense to me," I said nastily, sitting down again. It took me a while to stop feeling ashamed of myself for getting angry. Good thing, I thought, that I had never gone into practice. I'd probably go around kicking babies.

"Sorry," I said. "What happens when Jones dies?"

He shuddered, looking ill. "I suppose I'll hear only him—and without the help of the hearing aid. I am an experiment, you see. Until now, conservative spirits have been assigned to persons with no particular political viewpoint. On the precinct level, as Jones puts it."

"And these people on the precinct level," I said, "do they know their minds are—well, occupied?"

"No. These are the swing voters, the persons who belong to no party, but who decide our more emotional elections. A still, small voice in their otherwise politically inert minds is a much surer way of getting their votes than scouring the land to try to find an emotionally appealing candidate and

platform—not to mention the permanency of convictions."

I sat very still, as though a sudden movement might scare him away or shut him up. If the specialists hadn't been able to help him, how could I? But I wondered if they had seen what I had gradually been putting together—the rigid structure of logic built on the illogical premise. There was just one piece missing.

"If there are conservative spirits inhabiting people's heads," I said, "there must be so-called quote liberal unquote spirits, too. Right?"

Whitman gave a bitter little laugh. "Right. Jones is quite amused by them. They, as he puts it, knock themselves out converting the converted, mainly in Washington, D. C., the United Nations and other such places. Isn't it apparent enough? The conservative vote has been doubling and quadrupling for the last few elections, hasn't it? What other reason could there be for this phenomenon?"

"What indeed?" I said, keeping my opinion to myself.

"Exactly." He signalled Joe, who brought us refills. Whitman downed his drink in two swallows and headed for the cashier. "You leave the tip," he said over his shoulder, "then come with me."

OUTSIDE, Whitman steered me toward his newspaper's building. I tried hard to continue our conver-

sation, but he turned his head and showed me the transistor radio earplug in one ear and the hearing aid plug out of the other.

"Two reasons," he said. "One, I need my breath for walking. Two, I don't want to listen to Jones—he is stronger than ever."

We took the elevator up to the editorial offices, where he stopped to look at Harold M. N. Jones's obit, which was ready to go to press as soon as Jones died. Whitman seemed to get great pleasure out of reading it. Then we went to the wire room and watched the teletype machines drum out the latest news from all over.

There was a sudden scream from behind me. I whipped around. Whitman was stamping on his hearing aid and shrieking: "He's dead! Jones is dead!"

Then he sat down crosslegged on the floor, punching his temples with both fists. A crowd of employees had heard his scream and come running. I wished I had a black bag and a prescription pad. Without them, I was as helpless as everyone there.

"I hear him!" Whitman was yelling. "He's inside my head!"

"Somebody go for a doctor," an authoritative voice said. "You Walsh!"

They loosened his tie and opened his collar. He was a sight, sitting there on the floor, surrounded by worried people, all telling him to relax.

I restrained the urge to say:

"He can't hear you—his ears are filled with ectoplasm." I went outside and was heading for the water cooler when I realized it was right next to the wire room. The teletype was beating out the Jones item. Whitman had scooped it by several minutes.

I got a cup of water and made my way through the crowd.

"Fluoridation is *not* a Communist plot!" Whitman muttered. Then he looked up at me and took a pill from his vest pocket. Yeah, he wore a vest. Figures, doesn't it? I never suspected a thing when he put the pill in his mouth and gulped it down with the water I had brought. "Thank you, Doctor Hutton," he said. "I suggest that you prepare yourself for this—as I have."

"Prepare for *what*?" I asked in a panic, finally realizing what he had done.

He smiled, handed me his transistor radio, and then he died. Quietly. Just like that.

Then everything went silent. I could see the staff doctor come in with two men carrying a stretcher. But I couldn't hear a word, or the sound of the stretcher being put down, the old man being loaded on it. People were mouthing words I could not hear.

Nothing. Not a sound.

And then I couldn't hear myself yelling.

OKAY, I'll look at your notes. "What are you *doing here*?" You

(cont. on page 73)

WHEN TWO OR THREE ARE GATHERED

C.L. GRANT

C. L. Grant last appeared here with "Abdication" (October, 1973). Now he returns with a grim description of a near-future world in which education has taken a new turn . . .

illustrated by MIKE KALUTA

STAN KNELT MOTIONLESS in the deserted room. There was no furniture; only dust, droppings and the faint diamond glint of broken glass. He had pushed the others quite hard that night, trying to force a confrontation, but the one he suspected would be his youthful Judas only pushed back, respectfully. And now the class was over, the students long since pulled into the night behind the setting moon. Their whispers, their tireless probings were dormant for another week, and lost in the empty corridors of the fire-gutted building.

He was tired, feeling his age in spite of his health, yet his fingers easily packed away the texts in the dark. When he moved, finally, his feet lifted without hesitation over the seemingly random piles of debris. His breathing was shallow, his eyes squinted to pick out the way along the corridor, through a shattered glass door and into the air. Sunrise was too close for resting; he was shrouded by a

cold breeze. There was a momentary scuttling of vermin over loose, crumbling brick, but none of the usual glaring red eyes or startled chittering. He crouched waiting, and the ache of swiftly stiffening muscles settled over him like a finely woven net.

Cautiously he peered around the corner of the low building toward the road, feeling the pressure of canvas straps across his shoulders. As he watched for the patrol's lights, one hand automatically reached behind him to shift the rucksack's weight. And it wasn't until he realized that he was staring at the hazy birth of his shadow that he became aware of the black sky dying in a false dawn.

He had dozed, dangerously.

He shook his head in fearful disgust and straightened. Quickly he walked away from the school, away from the road, his legs trembling from inaction. Across a rutted, pitted field he followed a blind trail that was his with use.

Still the road was silent, and the only sounds were his old man's gasps.

He passed through a narrow stand of scrub pine and ducked into a drainage ditch until he assured himself no patrols would intercept him. He debated following the road into town—his legs were more tired than he expected—but it was too early to use hiking as an excuse. A hesitation, then he headed across another, smaller field, one cultivated and strewn with dead stalks of corn.

As the sun rose, he began to feel better, less insecure in the open. With considerable effort, he stood taller and added a brisk arm swing to his bravado gait when he stepped out of the field onto his street. More confident now, he yielded to an unconscious pursing of his lips, whistling, softly, as he passed the tiny houses still dark, still lifeless. In almost military fashion he turned into his walk, barely pausing long enough for the door to swing open before he stepped inside.

And once in the front room of the three-room house, with the rucksack lying at his feet, he sagged and closed his eyes, giving way finally to a powerful wave of fear and loneliness.

It was time, at long last time to quit before his own carelessness trapped him.

He showered, shaved, and changed his clothes from black to a pseudouniform of stained mus-



tard. There were still two hours before he had to head for his work at City Hall, and it was only a moment before he had coffee on the stove and a bowl of cold cereal on the kitchen table. Then, he quite deliberately walked from the room and made a telephone call.

"Harry," he said loudly, falsely jocular. "Harry, old buddy, get up, you slob. It's time for all right thinkers to be patiently pushing at that old patriotic economy."

There was a sour grumbling at the other end of the line.

"Oh, come on, Harry, it isn't that early. Early to bed, you know, and early to rise. That's Ben Franklin, in case you didn't know."

"Oh, dry up," the other man said. "You talk too much. And you were almost-caught again last night, weren't you?"

"Who told you that?"

"Confound it, Stan, the last time you got me up at six-thirty, the patrols kept you in that god-damned corn field for nearly five hours."

Stan sat down slowly, the jauntiness discarded as easily as it had been assumed. "Harry, it's no good, not anymore. I've got to quit. I'm too old. I've got to stop. Now. Before it's too late."

"You can't."

"Dammit, Harry, you don't know what happened to me out there! I fell asleep! Leaning against that confounded building, I fell asleep. I just now got in."

"Stan—"

"You don't know what I'm saying, do you? Harry, the sun was up before I reached my house. I fell asleep. Doesn't that tell you anything, anything at all?"

"Stan, shut up."

Stan glared around the room, looking for something to hate, trying to find a way to picture a man he had never met and whose name was probably not the correct one. He tried deep breathing to calm himself.

"Stan, you okay?"

"I suppose so."

"Okay. Now. You've been late before. You may have even had more than your share of close calls. What's the matter?"

"I . . . I didn't want to tell you until I was sure."

"What is it, Stan?"

"I think one of the kids is a plant."

This time there was silence. Stan began to feel giddy. "Did you hear me?"

"Find him."

"Oh, sure. How? I'm no superspy, Harry. I'm only an exed, for Christ's sake."

"Find him out, Stan, and fast. And when you do, kill him."

The line went dead.

For a long, incredulous moment Stan gaped at the dumb receiver trembling in his hand. Then he smiled, had to smile to keep from screaming and shuffled back into the kitchen.

He sat at the table, waiting for eight o'clock, the cereal in front of

him forgotten. Suddenly he jabbed a finger at the empty chair opposite him. "Okay, Stan Wood, tonight I want you to hustle what-hisname, Kevin Miller, into the darkest corner of the school, encase his scrawny throat in your mighty hands and silently, but terribly efficiently, strangle the life out of him. Got that, Stan, old boy? No slip-ups, now. We can't afford slip-ups, you know. It would look bad in the papers: Exed Adds Murder To Crimes Against State. People would talk. You might even get fired. Got that, Stan? Fired!"

He sighed and leaned back to stare at the ceiling. "Did you hear that nonsense? Did you hear it? He wants me, *me*, to kill a fourteen year old boy. Isn't it bad enough I was a teacher once? Isn't it bad enough I have to push a broom, and a useless one, for the rest of my life? Oh Christ, God, compared to me, You've got it easy."

He shook his head slowly, once, and stood up, leaning his hands on the table, bowing his head. Carefully, with ease nurtured through practice, he eliminated the conscious memory of the call, the class of the night before and all the classes of all the nights since he'd turned outlaw. There remained, as always, only the first call, the initial contact:

"Your name Stan Wood?"

"Yes, who is this please?"

"You can call me Harry. How would you like to teach again?"

"If this is some kind of joke, it isn't funny."

"No joke. And I mean real teaching. With kids who can't take the screened stuff. No tapes, no television. I mean live, with real students, in a classroom. With books."

"You're crazy."

"I'm serious."

"It's illegal."

"It's being done."

"So's murder, but that doesn't make it right."

"You miss teaching."

"Who the hell wouldn't? Hey, wait a minute, wait a minute, how do I know you're not a—"

"You don't, but I'm not. You want to teach again?"

"I . . . yes."

"We'll be in touch."

"So will the police."

"Don't worry."

"It's been fifteen years."

"You'll remember."

Every word every implausible, illegal word. Stan strained until they were gone, gone until the next time. His face relaxed, then, his jaw appeared to go slack and when, finally, he left the house, his shoulders were rounded and his feet scuffed the sidewalk. He was Stan Wood, City Hall custodian, day shift, rehabilitation employment courtesy of the Federal Government.

He said it to himself when people stared questioningly at him as if unsure he were safe to be moving about so freely.

He repeated it as a child repeats a prayer by rote.

And whenever he was accused by people who thought they remembered him, he denied himself.

THE BROOM pushed listlessly at a pile of dust and paper scraps, swirling it into a corner. The shift foreman leaned arrogantly against a gum dispensing machine and watched Stan, hearing but not listening to his mutterings. The foreman had five exeds on his tour, and he rarely missed an opportunity to express his displeasure at the way the government, to his way of thinking, misused his taxes.

"May of the doe eyes? Impossible. Cindy, then. Rose. Tom the seeker, maybe, or Philip, the thirsty one. Will? David. Ed, the youngest? No. Kevin. Must be. Must be Kevin . . ."

Stan didn't turn but a pattern of cold on his back warned him of the foreman's presence. His palms perspired and the broom jerked unevenly across the red-and-green checked floor. He tried to regulate his breathing, his movements, the fear that he had already been denounced. He succeeded only in tripping over his own feet, and the foreman laughed. Stan braced himself against the handle and turned around to stare: the mouth was open, the eyes closed, clothes pressed, tie straight, shoes shined.

"Wood!"

"Yessir?"

"You missed a spot, Wood."

"Sorry."

"I'm watching you, Wood."

"Sir?"

"You're strange, you know that, Wood?" The foreman didn't move.

"Sir?"

"Just you be careful. I'm watching you, Wood. You just be careful."

"Yessir. I will, sir."

The foreman grunted, snorted, then distainfully stepped over Stan's shadow and hurried down the corridor toward the rear of the building. Businesswomen, secretaries, tourists passed by, glancing perhaps, but immediately dismissing the greying man leaning on the broom. They tracked moisture on the floor; their coats dripped water, and Stan, his panic and anger subsided, exchanged his sweeper for a mop until a buzzer, subdued but insistant, signaled noon.

Lunch was eaten in a small locker room in the basement with the others. The men seldom talked about anything but the foreman, the union, the government, football. The five who had been educators avoided each other, conscious of their special, infamous status and eager to pay the cost of sidestepping antagonisms. And each suspected the other of being an outlaw.

Stan, unable to maintain the guise of acceptance for very long, finished quickly and went outside. The sky was grey, pausing a

moment before raining again, a November rain as dead as the ground it spattered. He squinted across the gardens browning and browned, recognizing the habit of resurrection but unwilling to break it. The gardens blurred and he was watching the way it ended: beginning and ending with the colleges. The polls and populace clamor for quality education; enrollment increases with cost and a bandwagon of government-sponsored schooling. More students, less teachers, and the lectures became tapes. The idea caught, proliferated, became a business. Cable television, public broadcasting and the right to learn.

Stan watched the dead plants stiffly resisting the rain: headlines, stories and the outraged screams of a dying profession; the most brilliant, most resilient absorb themselves into the new way, the merely competent shunted aside. Math, science, the foreign languages and manual arts faded into government and industry, and there was a flurry of emigration. Stan was the protector of a superfluous subject, a glut upon the market: English. He tried writing, but a writer needs a reading population and printed media, and there were so few as to be practically nonexistent for the masses who needed work.

The rain temporarily cut off the garden, then lightened and slowed to a drizzle: rehabilitation. Make-work. Broom-pushing.

"What are you thinking?"

Stan refused to look around. It was one of the others, whose name and face he preferred not to know.

"About the end. What else?"

"Long time ago."

"For some, not long enough."

The other man coughed into a shaking fist. Stan wondered if this was the time, and Judas would not be a student but a former colleague instead.

"You should become an outlaw."

"That's not funny," Stan said, trying not to choke.

The other man winced an apology, lighted a cigarette without offering one. "Funny, isn't it."

"What."

"How . . . how the people turned. I think a lot about that. I mean, as soon as we were . . . you know . . . it seemed that everybody had a stinking grudge, like it was our fault they couldn't be taught at home before. I once had a neighbor who used to send me little notes every morning. 'Those who can't do, teach.' I finally moved. Funny."

"Hilarious. Maybe *you* should become an outlaw. Teach somewhere."

"That's not funny, mister."

Stan rubbed his eyes with his palms and turned to go inside. "I know."

HE STOOD in the center of the corridor staring at the ceiling as if he were awaiting the arrival of

Damocles' spectre. The feeling was assuredly there, and the great golden spearhead chandeliers did not go a long way toward dispelling it. His neck began to ache, and he started working again, driving the same sodden pile of dust/mud until it became, by turns, a winding road along which he might escape had he the energy to run, and the dirty neck of a young boy he had been so capriciously ordered to kill. He wanted to cry.

At the juncture of corridor and the vast main entrance way, he allowed himself an uninterested glance at the people coming and going. By one of the express elevators a tall man stood, darkly, conservatively dressed. He was solemn, his head cocked to listen to the boy standing beside him.

It was Kevin Miller. Stan ducked around the corner and watched, trying desperately to make some sense from the lips that slashed the boy's pale face. He saw the young eyes flit from elevator door to floor, the hands bunched in trouser pockets, the one foot that shifted as if it were digging a trench in mud. The two did not look in his direction, but Stan felt as though a target had been suddenly grafted to his head, with his forehead in the center. He froze until the broom handle slipped from his grasp and clattered to the patterned stone. No one looked, but he jumped at the sound nevertheless and scrambled to pick it up. "One

more," he husked to the weak shadow on the floor. "I've got to have one more. There's so much to tell them. God, I've simply got to have one more!"

He hurried awkwardly to his feet and spun around. The foreman was leaning against the wall, chewing gum and smoothing his lapels.

"One more what, Wood?"

Stan clenched his fists around the handle. "Nothing. A . . . a drink. I'm very tired and a drink would . . . would pick me up."

The foreman reached out a manicured hand and took the broom. "One more what, Wood?"

"I told you. A drink, that's all."

"I thought you never touched the stuff."

Stan tried a self-effecting grin. "Well, you know how it is when you live alone. I mean, we exeds, we have to have something to do at night. I kind of like a little something stronger than milk."

"Sure, Wood. Who's May?"

"My sister."

He tried to take the broom back, but the foreman pulled it just out of reach.

"You're strange, Wood, you know that? Stranger than the others I got working here. Every time I see you, I think about how strange you are. You don't get enough sleep, you know that? You know something else? I never been inside a school in my life. Got it all right in my living room."

Stan looked up at him, half-

frowning.

"Not once in my whole life. How about that? When was the last time you were in a school, Wood?"

"Fifteen years ago, give or take a few."

The foreman laughed, silently, and rubbed a stiff finger under his nose. "Too bad you didn't pick a subject you could use, Wood. But don't let it get you down. You'd better change your clothes."

"Why?"

"They want you upstairs right away. Could be a promotion, though at your age I kind of doubt it. Maybe you'll get in on the night shift, who knows? Easy work for a guy like you. All you do is open a door and push a button. The machines get all the work done. Cushy, Wood. Real soft." He laughed, again silently, and scrubbed a palm against his cheek. "Now get going, old man, they're waiting for you."

Stan reached for the broom, saw he still wasn't going to get it and brushed past the foreman toward the stairs. And again he could feel that cold on his back and tried to recapture the feeling he had had that morning when his back was straight and his arms swung. But it didn't work, not this time, and when he reached the locker room door, he kicked it open in a sudden, refreshing burst of anger.

"Damn!" he yelled at the empty room. "Why the hell couldn't he have waited just one

more goddamned miserable day?"

He yanked a spare set of street clothes from his locker and ripped the legs of his custodian's uniform as he jerked his shoes free. There was a tiny mirror taped to the inside of the door and, while he dressed, he counted the grey and the wrinkles.

"Damn you, Wood, why the hell can't you be more of a man for once in your life?"

He stared at himself and blinked heavily.

"What's the matter with you? There're no guards. Why don't you just walk out of here?"

He touched a cheek with one timid finger.

"You're going to be tossed in jail, anyway."

He almost smiled.

"If you can get home and bury those texts, it'll be your word against theirs, against Miller's. The others won't turn against you, you know that. Why not, Wood?"

He paused, then grabbed an overcoat from the locker shelf, slid into it as he left the building by the rear door, and with little effort, slowed himself as he walked across the wide City Plaza toward the street. Strangely enough, he felt no immediate sense of guilt, of being pursued and watched by every citizen he passed. Stepping up his pace, he ignored the puddles and the sodden islands of dead leaves, looking straight ahead until he reached the bus stop. When the proper connection arrived, he sat

in the front.

Ten minutes.

It passed without his knowing it. It was as if the universe had become fog.

His street was empty: no children, no pets. He listened as though expecting the stab of a siren or the baying of hounds.

Inside, he burrowed under the divan for the rucksack and rushed into the bedroom. Elation. Sweet. Breathing heavily now, his fingers wouldn't hold the books hidden on the closet shelf. He fell to his knees in the dustless room. If we were lucky, Harry might have some sort of underground railway for exeds on the run. He smiled at the spurt of romanticism and shoved all the evidence into the canvas sack. The snap didn't work. He fumbled, swearing, then stiffened at the sound of the front door closing.

There were three or four of them. He closed his eyes.

"Stanley Wood?"

He slumped, and nodded.

"You are accused of conducting an illegal series of classroom activities determined to be a deliberate and malicious attempt to undermine the prior education of those who are engaged in the same and aforementioned activities. You have the right to remain silent. You may contact your own lawyer or, if you prefer, the State will provide one for you to be present at any and all interrogations dealing with this charge. Will you come with us now, Mr.

Wood?"

Stan fingered the canvas lying between his knees. "I should have known."

"What?"

"I said, I should have known. I should have known I'd be watched, being what I am. I should have known there would be somebody in charge of weeding out the malcontents and diehards like me, sooner or later. You probably pull the same routine on all the exeds." He didn't look up; it wasn't yet the time. "What about the youngsters?"

"When identified, they'll be re-educated."

"Why . . . why did you tell me to kill Miller?"

"To try to force him into a panic, make him break the thing open. But we didn't need it. You pushed him too hard. He was only a boy, Stan. Just a boy."

"Oh."

"We also tried to scare you out of it. We've had some success in that direction, with others. Miller wasn't a plant, you know. There wasn't one."

Stan slapped his thighs and pushed himself to his feet.

"I'm sorry, Stan. Christ, but I'm sorry. I kind of liked you. God knows I tried to drive you out of it any number of times, but you were too . . . too . . ."

"Dedicated."

"Stubborn, you old bastard."

"You know, I wish I had the strength, and the age, to fight

you, Harry."

"Fight what, Stan? You'd lose, sooner or later."

"Maybe," Stan said, turning around at last. "Then again, maybe not."

Harry did nothing, not even blinked, when Stan reached down

for the rucksack and threw it wordlessly through the bedroom window. And though neither of them said a word on the way to the Hall of Detention, Stan managed to smile.

—C. L. GRANT

Second Creation (cont. from page 33)

What were they thinking? Malachi wondered. The same thoughts as he?

No. For he—a dog—was one of the vanquished. He was as surely dead as the man himself. There stood the winners—robots—rulers of the earth now, perhaps the heavens as well later.

Turning, Malachi went away. The Cavern of Man faded behind him, and the nineteen living robots, and T39. A10, too. And the man who was dead, and the girl—Marilyn Tipton—who had never really lived. Fading—all of

it—disappearing behind.

Malachi paused. He made himself turn once more, but he was too far away now to see anything except a faint cloud of gray smoke rising lightly through the sheer blue sky.

He wanted to wish them—all of them—whoever and whatever they were—he wanted to wish them well. That was all. He thought he could afford such a wish. For himself, nothing else remained.

—GORDON EKLUND

That's The Spirit (cont. from page 63)

mean you don't know? This is a mental hospital, isn't it? And you're psychiatrists, aren't you?

As I said at the beginning, I'm here for sanctuary.

I'm also here for a hearing aid. No, I can't hear you. Not over these two bloody fools yelling at me and at each other inside my head: "Abolish integrated schools!" "Don't you do any such thing!" "Reimpose the death penalty—castrate rapists—" "Do not sterilize everyone on welfare!"

And so forth.

"Why are you wearing the transistor?" I'm wearing it tuned in loud, but *loud*, to a rock station for the same reason old Warren Whitman had—to drown out the two voices yammering inside my skull!

"But why can't you hear us?" you're asking.

Isn't that obvious?

Because my ears are filled with ectoplasm!

—HORACE L. GOLD

A CREATURE OF ACCIDENT

THOMAS F. MONTELEONE

Tom Monteleone, whose book reviews here have created some controversy and whose first published story was "Agony in the Garden" (March, 1973), has since been published in several anthologies of original sf. He now returns to our pages with a brooding story about a man who, after a long career of failure, finally discovers the first traces of a non-human culture . . .

illustrated by JEFF JONES

AFTER THE SHIP touched down, Dr. Fiore left his assistant Kirkland, and climbed the ladder leading to the bridge. He had made this trip many times and the results were always the same. On the bridge, one of Captain Vandermeer's men sat hunched over a console. Fiore felt uneasy as he approached the crewman, who had looked up at him silently.

"Can I help you, Doctor?"

Fiore's muscles tightened in his neck and he made a semblance of coming to attention. The crewman stared at him but said nothing. Fiore heard himself talking: "Yes. I want to have a look at the scans. You have them yet?"

"Oh, yessir. They're in the basket over there," pointing to a bin beneath a print-out slot.

The doctor ran the sheet through his hands, reading data that had become very familiar to him through the years. No unusual formations. No high alloy

concentrations. Nothing except some high readings in the radiation count. He dropped the sheet back into the basket. "Anything show up on the cameras?"

The crewman swiveled in his chair. "Not sure. I haven't checked, but the plates should be ready by now. Want to see them on a screen?"

Fiore nodded and the man pressed a series of buttons which caused a three dimensional image to appear on one of the console screens. Fiore flashed through a group of uninteresting shots taken from orbit, but he stopped as he came to a frame in which there seemed to be several geometric shadows—elongated rectangles that stretched across the orange soil. He switched the magnification and the dark shapes grew larger. A frost gripped his spine. His mind raced ahead, thinking of what the images implied.

"What's the matter?" asked the crewman, who had been watching

Fiore's tense features.

The doctor wiped the perspiration from his brow as he spoke. "I'm not sure, but I think we've finally got something. Look. See those dark patches? They don't seem like natural formations. Too linear. Too exact. They're most likely shadows—cast from some kind of structure."

The crewman laughed. "Well, why can't we see them? Why just the shadows?"

"I don't know," said Fiore, who grew defensive at the laughter. "But I'm going to check it out. Do you have the coordinates of this plate?"

"No, but I can get them."

"Good. Run them off and send them down to me. I'll be at the base outside the ship." Fiore left the room before the crewman could answer. As he climbed down, he noticed that his grip was unsure, his steps unsteady.

OUTSIDE THE SHIP, he didn't need an EVA suit. The atmosphere was somewhat rich in the inert gases, with less oxygen than the earth-standard, but it was breathable. The gravity was 1.2g, which made movement just slightly more difficult.

Fiore found Kirkland and the two other members of his team, Mendez and Frazier, setting up the base camp. They were standing with Vandermeer and another crewman.

Captain Vandermeer stood out from the others. He had always



reminded Fiore of a bird. Tall, thin, almost frail looking. He, like Fiore, wore glasses, but the frames were heavy and black. The glasses rested on a blade-like nose which greatly enhanced his bird image. His brown hair was laced with grey, although Fiore knew him to be twenty years younger than himself. His voice was deep and resonant. He began to speak as Fiore approached.

"Ah, Doctor, I was just going to explain the situation to your men. As you know, 200 hours is the limit. But there may be other problems. Scans have picked up unusual radiation. It's being checked now. Doesn't seem to be anything dangerous, but you—"

"Wait," Fiore cut him off. "I just came from the bridge. I think we've got something."

Vandermeer remained silent, indicating that he continue.

Fiore told him of the formations he had seen, and Vandermeer went to the radio shack for confirmation of the coordinates. Several minutes passed before he returned. "He's got them. About 20 miles northwest of the ship. Says it doesn't look like much, though." Vandermeer smiled at the older man.

Fiore's face reddened. "What does he know! One of your second classers is going to tell me what to look for? Fiore clenched his fists at his side.

Vandermeer reacted to his anger. "Hey, I'm sorry, Doctor. No harm done. I was just—"

"Just give me the coordinates."

The captain looked up at the alien planet's sky. "You've still got some daylight left. Why don't you take the tracs and have a look?"

Fiore swallowed hard and nodded. He snatched the print-out from Vandermeer's outstretched hand and walked toward the nearest halftrac. As he walked away, he heard one of the crewman comment to Vandermeer about his show of anger. He looked back to see Vandermeer shaking his head.

He assigned Kirkland and the others to the second trac, reserving the other for his private use. It was Fiore's usual custom to make the first excursion on a new world by himself so that he could acclimate himself to the terrain without the distracting conversation. He looked in the mirror to see Kirkland's machine directly behind him. The three men were laughing and talking as they drove along. He nodded and smiled inwardly, thinking that he was wise to avoid wasted energy. Then he remembered his outburst with the captain, and the mumblings of the crew as he left camp. *Could his men be laughing at him?*

He traveled in a northwestern direction. The maps from the scan indicated an inland sea near the site of the formations. Things were fitting into place. Many of man's early civilizations had been found near water. He increased the speed of the trac.

The minutes passed, and as

they approached the inland sea, Fiore noticed sparse and wiry vegetation, the first he had seen on the dry surface of this planet. The temperature was cool, better than the heat of other desert worlds he had explored without success. Perhaps it was a good omen.

There were mountains on the horizon, but he estimated that their foothills began quite a bit closer. The peaks were rounded and smooth, unlike some of the worlds he had seen where the mountains were sharp and jagged, indicating their youth. Only the older worlds would have intelligent life. That took time. He thought of how many times his tracs had crossed alien soil, crunching up stone and dirt that had never felt the touch of any moving thing. How many times had he looked out on plains of bleak emptiness?

Too many, he thought. For twenty years he and his crew had been little more than dead weight, ballast, on the deepspace vessels. The energy of his life, his work, had been dissipated across the long light-years between stars. Months of anticipation that had always ended in the same hollow feeling of despair, as his ship had lifted off another dead world.

Still he clung to his simple beliefs: there *were* other civilizations, other cultures. Evolution could not be a freak of the universe, there had to be other instances of places like Earth sup-

porting life. In the past century, man had only begun to explore the galaxy and an almost endless number of worlds. It had been Fiore's dream to be one of the men who would bring back the evidence that man was not alone. That would be convincing proof that man was a successful organism, capable of evolving in more than one place in the galaxy. He *knew* that man was not just a combination of random events, not just a sentient creature of accident. Fiore was stirred from his thoughts by a shape that began to peek over the horizon. Picking up the field glasses, he pressed the zoom, and the object ahead swelled in magnification. His fingers trembled as it took shape, and, amplified by the rocking motion of the trac, the image tottered in the glasses. He switched on the intercom and called Kirkland, who was following in the wake of his trac. "Kirkland, can you see it?"

"Yessir. Mendez's got the glasses on it. Some sort of building!"

The speaker cracked, waiting for Fiore's reply. He swallowed hard, trying to keep the lump out of his throat as he spoke. "All right, let's go."

He switched off the intercom and jammed the throttle down hard. The sound of the trac's engine roared across the plain and the vehicle churned up rooster-tails of sand. Fiore felt the blood pounding in his ears; the handgrip of the stick became moist despite

the wind that whistled through the cab. The closer the tracs came to the object, the more of its mass rose above the horizon until it was completely visible. It was a large stone structure with a massive roof; its angular lines were accented with hundreds of columns sinking into the sand. Fiore grasped the immense proportions of the building, estimating that its longest side was almost a quarter of a mile in length. The columns were several storeys high, and their style was a subtle blend of the architectures of Earth's ancient ruins. The stone was of the same general color as the orange soil and sand. Fiore imagined this was why the ship's cameras had only detected the shadows.

He brought the trac to a halt at the base of one of the giant columns, as he heard Kirkland pull up behind him. Jumping from the cabs, all four men ran through the drifted sand, eager to examine the ruins.

"Look at the size of this place!" cried Kirkland.

"Goddamn!"

Fiore listened to their exclamations and watched them as they ran their fingers over the wind-polished stone. He looked through the columns to the building's interior and the areas beyond. There were three other buildings in the distance that were equal in size to the first. Looking up to a frieze that decorated the roof line, he saw that it was covered with alien inscrip-

tions and carvings.

Fiore left the other men to enter the structure. Walking between the columns, he imagined that a cloak was being laid over his shoulders. It was a shroud to protect him from the phantoms of the dead culture that still lived within the ruins. He seemed to feel the throbbing movement of a great crowd as it surged through the great halls of the building. With each step through the drifted sand, he felt himself being immersed deeper into the mist of an alien time. The sensation was overpowering. Fiore's mind flooded with a mixture of images. He had the feeling that something was taking over his thoughts.

There was a touch on his shoulder. Fiore stiffened and whirled to face a somewhat startled Kirkland.

"I'm sorry, sir," the assistant said. "I guess you didn't hear me. I was calling you."

Fiore let out a breath and removed his glasses to fidget with them. The wind had blown his hair into his face and without his glasses, his eyes appeared to be small and slitted.

"Sorry, Kirkland, I guess I was just carried away by this place." Fiore was surprised to hear the calmness in his own voice. After all the years, he wouldn't have expected such a serene reaction to the discovery.

Kirkland spoke again. "Frazier is checking out the other three buildings. They form a big court-

yard with this one."

"Yes, I know," said Fiore. "There's plenty of work for us right here. We can spend years on this site alone." He replaced his glasses. The odd feelings had left him for the moment. "I suppose we should report back to Vandermeer. I'll get hold of him. You men see if any dates can be established."

Turning from Kirkland, he walked back to the trac and pulled the microphone from the clip. "Vandermeer—this is Fiore. You read me?"

"One moment, Doctor. Captain's below deck. I'll patch you in."

Fiore waited, thinking of how he would describe the site to his captain:

The intercom cracked. "Yes, Doctor. This is Vandermeer. I was just checking on your position. Our instruments indicate that the party has stopped about 20 miles northwest. Everything O.K.?"

"We checked the scan coordinates from the cameras. We've found something—something big."

There was a pause before Vandermeer's voice came through the speaker. "We don't read anything except your tracs and some natural rock. What's going on?"

"They're not natural formations. Four large buildings, but made of the same sandstone material as the plain. They look very old. Obviously the work of an ad-

vanced civilization."

"That's good, Doctor. I'll pass it along to the crew. You be back by nightfall?"

Fiore noticed the flat, official tone in Vandermeer's speech. The captain was unmoved by the importance of the discovery. After a pause, he answered. "Yes, Captain. I should be able to tell you more then. Out."

Fiore clicked off the set and returned to the site, where Kirkland and the others were setting up some pieces of equipment and taking holographs of all the structures.

He walked past the men, purposefully avoiding them, to once again climb through the mounded sand and enter the building. He wanted to assume that it was some sort of temple, and in his mind, he was already referring to it as such. Some of the inner facings were lined with sculptures of strange creatures. They sat along ledges and over arches, leaning over, peering down at Fiore with large saucer-eyes. From their gaping mouths, Fiore imagined clouds of hot, steaming breath. He looked up at the gargoyle above him. It was similar to ones seen in Earth's cathedrals, hunched down on scaly legs. The arms were extended, ending in sharp talons instead of hands. He studied the fine detail that had gone into its creation. What type of being was this? Something from this culture's dark and unknown mythology, or was it a creature

that once roamed the planet?

As he stared into the face of the stone being, he again felt the dead world's spirits. It was like a soft voice calling to him deep within his mind, the same as before, only stronger this time. He sensed a *presence*. It seemed to be oozing out of the crevices surrounding Fiore, changing him. Fiore knew there was power to be gained from whatever it was that was seeping into him. Power to unlock the ancient knowledge of ruins. He wanted to submit to the strange sensations.

He checked his chrono and looked up at the darkening sky. They would have to be heading back soon. He decided to join his men, although he had an urge to remain in the temple alone. As he left the inner chambers, he felt that his thinking had cleared somewhat, as if the temple itself had some control over him. He began to wonder about the odd feelings, about his need to avoid his men. There was no apparent reason for such actions.

Frazier approached him. He had finished some preliminary tests on the age of the buildings and he announced this to Fiore. "—15,000, sir."

"What? Are you sure?" Fiore figured that if the dates were correct, the site was three times as old as the pyramids.

"I checked them twice. I know it's hard to believe. And Mendez thinks the stone is almost too well-preserved for that amount of

time."

"Anything else?"

"The columns extend for about fifteen feet below the surface. Soundings indicate there are lots of large rooms below the base of the columns."

"Have you checked the other buildings?" Fiore was asking the questions out of a sense of duty rather than curiosity. He had the feeling that it all wasn't necessary, but certain appearances had to be maintained. Whenever it occurred to him that he had finally found proof of another civilization, something inside kept blotting out the enthusiasm that he felt he should have. Something was missing. The picture wasn't yet complete.

Frazier spoke again. "Don't know yet. The other guys are working on it now. They're all of the same basic design, so I'd guess they're—"

"Well," Fiore cut him off. "It doesn't matter anyway. We'll be finding out soon enough."

Frazier started to answer, but Fiore had already turned away from him, heading back to the trac to get a camera. Somehow it didn't matter what anyone said anymore.

THAT EVENING after mess, Fiore retired to his cabin with a large sheaf of holographs taken at the site. He studied them intently, not hearing the door open. Someone called his name. He turned and saw the towering figure of

Vandermeer in the doorway.

"I hope I'm not disturbing you?" asked the captain.

Fiore assembled the papers together into a neat pile, and removed his glasses to massage his eyes before answering. "No, no. It's all right. I was just going over some of the data."

"There's something I want to talk about. Something you should know." There was a flatness about Vandermeer's voice, as if he had been practicing the line like an amateur actor.

"Yes, of course. Please, sit down."

Vandermeer seated himself and began. "I've known you for some time now. And I know what you've been through for a lot longer than that."

Fiore remained silent, simply nodding his head. He could almost imagine what the younger man was about to say.

"I'm no archeologist, but I can appreciate what you've found out there today," said Vandermeer, trying to strip away the formality of his speech. "And I know you want to spend a lot of time on the planet, to work on the project. You went up to the bridge tonight."

"Yes," said Fiore. "I asked communications to send off a message to Earth . . . About the site."

"That's not all you sent," Vandermeer's voice was more official, his face became stern.

Fiore felt his face redden. "No,

that wasn't all. You know about the extension?"

"Yes, and I couldn't let it go out."

Fiore stiffened in his chair, his knuckles whitened as he gripped the arms of his seat. "Why not? You've got to—"

"Wait a minute. Let me explain something to you. Earth's been informed of the discovery. I wouldn't stop that. It's the extension. I couldn't let it go."

"But why?"

"Doctor, this crew's been in deepspace for over 2½ years, with most of it spent inside the ship. I don't have to tell you what that's like. They're tired and they want to get back home. This planet was the last scheduled stop, and they know it." Vandermeer paused to light a cigarette.

Fiore was getting confused. The strange effect of the discovery, the crew's negative reaction to it, the captain's words, all were threatening to overwhelm him. Surely the captain wouldn't leave just because of the crew's feelings. "They don't want me to explore the site?"

Vandermeer exhaled quickly. "No, that's not it! Listen, there's something else—far more important. We've detected some unusual radiation in this area. The preliminary tests aren't complete, but it seems to be of a dangerous nature. The lab says that it can't reliably predict yet whether any serious effects will arise if we stayed here."

"What does this mean, what you've told me?" Fiore asked defensively.

"Simply that we may have to lift off at any time, depending on what the results are from the tests we're running. We can't stay if it's going to be dangerous."

"Can't we just leave this area? Maybe the radiation is localized—Maybe—"

"Can't count on it," said Vandermeer waving a hand to quiet him. "I can't run the ship on 'maybes.' You know that."

"Well, what about tomorrow? Can I take my men out to the site?"

Vandermeer paused. "Well, the tests aren't definite yet. I don't know about that."

"We won't be any safer if we stay on the ship! Please, Captain. I must get back to that site. Look at me, I'm an old man! They don't want old men in space. When you take me back to Earth, it'll be for the last time. I won't be going out anymore."

"You can't be sure. Maybe they will grant you special permission to return."

"Now who's talking about 'maybe?'"

Vandermeer managed a weak smile. "All right. You can go out there in the morning, but if the lab comes up with anything definite, I'm going to have to call you in." He stubbed out his cigarette. "It's late. We can talk about it in the morning." Vandermeer got up and left the cabin, not waiting for

a reply.

Too many things were happening at once. Fiore couldn't think. He undressed for bed, turned off the lamp, but couldn't fall asleep. In the darkness of the room he saw the shape of the temples jutting out of the sand. He saw the carvings and inscriptions and he imagined that he could read them. He saw the men who had built them, as if through a dream. They were a tall, golden-skinned people, fashioned from Michaelangelo's mold. A people that he had reached across the stars to finally touch. The images danced about the room, congealing into one confusing mass. It seemed so important that he sort them out, but as he began the effort, he fell asleep.

FIORE HAD HIS MEN at the site just as the alien sun rose above the horizon. Aside from the few electronic instruments, their tools were those of past years: shovels, axes, and dust brooms.

They spent the morning finishing up the preliminaries that they had begun the day before. A sounding device had located several entrances below the surface that led into the inner chambers of the temple. The four men spent most of the day carefully digging out the sand around one of the entrances.

As they worked, Fiore listened abstractly to the conversation of his men, joining in several times. But his mind was on other mat-

ters. He kept expecting to hear the intercom crackle with Vandermeer's voice, telling them to return to the ship. He thought about the radiation, the temple, the strange feelings. Fiore was confused. Things weren't fitting together. *There must be a way*, he thought.

By mid-afternoon, they reached an opening in the base of structure. The loose sand fell away to reveal a dark passageway. "There it is," said Kirkland. "Just like the sounder said."

Without saying a word, the men began working harder to clear an entrance large enough for the team to pass through. Fiore strapped on a lamp to his belt and led the way into the passage. They paused to examine some of the workmanship of the first hallway, noting that the uneroded stone was fitted together in precise blocks. The work was superior to the stonecutting found in Egypt.

The hallway opened into a large room with a buttressed, vaulted ceiling. It was immense, even in the dim light of their lamps. The four men crossed the room in silence, their footsteps echoing against dark and distant walls. Fiore could hear their breathing and smell their sweat, a mixture of exhaustion and fear. He felt his own forehead and noticed that it was cool and dry. The strange sensations were returning.

Frazier's lamp spiked into the darkness and revealed a large

splash of color. The other lamps followed, and they illuminated a gigantic mural covering the entire wall at the end of the room.

"Christ! Look at this thing!"

There was a scraping sound as their boots ground to a halt on the stone floor. Fiore looked into the picture which showed mighty armies clashing on an open plain. Some of the soldiers were astride strange beasts, others were on foot. All of the figures were clothed in long, flowing robes, so that their shapes couldn't be discerned.

"What is it?" said Kirkland. He reached out a hand to touch the surface of the mural. Because of its great age, it was impossible to determine whether or not it was a mosaic or paint.

"Look at the perspective," said Frazier. "It's almost like a holograph. Everything just trails off to the horizon . . ."

The mural became three-dimensional to Fiore. He imagined that the beam of his lamp had penetrated the picture and was dancing upon the hideous creatures enmeshed in conflict. He was being swallowed up by some force that was emanating from painting to slowly engulf him. He had the feeling that he was gaining the power of telepathy, that he could communicate without actually speaking to his men. Something reaching out to him, massaging his awareness.

Mendez had straggled away from the group, flashing his lamp

into the dark corners of the room. Beneath an archway, his lamp revealed a set of stairs; and motioning to the others, he walked over to investigate. Kirkland had to grab Fiore by the arm to get his attention.

The doctor turned and looked at him in the dim light. "Yes?"

"Doctor, are you all right?"

Fiore, still deeply moved by the experience with the mural, wondered why Kirkland had bothered to speak. *Telepathy would have been much simpler.* But he decided to answer him anyway. "Yes, of course, Kirkland. What is it?"

"There's more. Over here," he said, pointing to the entrance that Mendez had found. "Let's go."

Fiore followed the men down the stairway, and was struck by a damp, musky odor. He watched the beams from the lamps flicker and jump upon the stone facings of the stairwell, and he imagined that he could control the patterns of light as they fell across his path merely by thinking about it.

At the bottom, the men followed a cavern which opened into a large underground chamber. The walls of the room were covered with murals. The room itself was filled with several ranks of stone slabs or pedestals. Atop each slab was the body of some sort of creature. Some of the bodies were mere skeletons, while others were mummified—a dessicated husk stretched over the bones. They advanced to the

nearest of the bodies to examine it. The remains were only slightly human, being bipedal, but the long, spindly legs ended in talons rather than feet. The pelvis was wide and angular, supporting a large rib cage. The arms were short and articulated in three places, with claws like a crustacean. The skull was large, appearing to be out of proportion with the rest of the body. Its round, eyeless sockets stared upward from the dais. Instead of a definite jaw and teeth, there was a mandible-like mouth that curved into the shape of a vestigial beak.

Fiore stared at the creature, and then out at the others surrounding it. He was seeing the remains in his own image; and he reached out to touch the skull. He ran his fingers down the arm and grasped long and graceful fingers. To Fiore, the creature almost responded with warm familiarity. The other men were watching him, but that did not matter, he felt a swelling within his chest, a surge of emotion. He wished to communicate with the being on the stone slab, to raise him from the sleep of death and learn the secrets of his world. He turned to face his companions, whose faces were solemn and silent, without expression.

Throwing up his arms, Fiore smiled. The men drew back from him.

"Look at them!" he cried. His voice echoed through the chamber, violating the silence of

many centuries. "I was right! Look! Not alone anymore—not ever again. There *are* other men!" He waved his hand over the nearest body. His face was alive and bright even in the light of the lamps.

"I'd hardly call them 'men,' sir. They don't even look humanoid," said Kirkland, who turned to others for confirmation of what he said. Both men nodded silently.

"Kirkland, what're you saying?"

"I don't understand—" Kirkland laughed nervously.

Fiore smiled. "Of course they're humanoid. They're *human*! Like me. Like *yōu*!" Fiore wished that he could explain what he had seen. He tried his newly acquired telepathic powers, but Kirkland and the others didn't seem to be responding. For some reason they were not aware of the great discovery he had made. One of the men started to speak. Fiore heard the voice through what seemed like fog.

"What's come over him?"

"Don't know. Never seen anything like this."

"We better get him out of here."

Fiore's mind jumped at the words. *They're against me.* For some reason they wanted to take him away from the new men that he had found. He looked out upon the rows of sarcophagi, raising his arms as if to ask them why this could be so. He felt arms holding him, turning him and

guiding him from the room. He was being carried up the stairway. Fiore shouted. They must stop. He kicked at them, still screaming, but still he felt himself being carried upwards. He looked into their straining faces, their teeth bared as they struggled with him. He would fight them. Stop them. He lunged at the closest one and slipped on the stone steps. He was falling—

—FIORE OPENED HIS EYES to the familiar setting of his quarters on the ship. He was lying down, covered with a blanket. There was small lamp on his desk filling the room with soft even light. He remembered blacking out in the temple. He sat up and felt his mind clearing. He smiled as he recalled his discoveries. But like a blot, came the remembrance of the fight with his men. He wondered why they had turned against him, especially since he had made such a great find. Things were not making sense. He began to feel a powerful but unlabeled fear. He got up from his bunk and opened the door to his cabin.

He was surprised to see one of Vandermeer's men barring the way. The man's name was De-Silva, whom Fiore knew only by name. Fiore cringed. *They're all against me.*

"I'm sorry, sir. The captain says you're to be confined to quarters." The man's face was hard, his jaw set.

"Confined? Why? I've done nothing." Fiore felt like a criminal. He dropped his eyes, shaking his head.

"Sorry, sir. I don't know why. He just said you're to stay here."

Fiore closed the door, and his courage returned. He was becoming angry.

"Vandermeer!" Fiore yelled as he switched on the intercom. "This is Fiore. I must see you at once."

Fiore heard a muffled voice. "Sir, it's the doc. He's awake. What should I tell him?"

After a pause, the intercom crackled again. "Doctor Fiore, this is Vandermeer. Please remain in your quarters. I'm coming down to see you." The set went dead.

Fiore attempted to contact the bridge several more times but with no affect. He switched off the set and returned his bunk where he sat brooding, very impatient.

While he was waiting and going over what he would say to the captain, he noticed the clock. If it was correct, he had been unconscious for 24 hours. He remembered the site, the radiation—

The door opened with a click as the latch was turned and Fiore looked up to meet the serious eyes of the Captain.

"Well, Doctor, how do you feel?" Vandermeer seemed to be concerned.

"All, right, I suppose." Fiore couldn't raise the anger he had

planned. "Yes, I would say I'm all right."

"You've been out for almost a day."

Fiore pointed to the clock and rubbed his temples. "Yes, I know. What happened?"

"Your men didn't think you were acting right. Then you blacked out."

"I see."

"Yes, you might say that you've had a bit of a lapse—a brief illness."

Fiore shook his head. *This wasn't right.* "Captain, about the site . . . I must get back to the temple as soon as—"

Vandermeer didn't say anything, but the expression on his face caused Fiore to stop.

"I'm afraid you'll have to forge about going back, Doctor. We're lifting off in four hours. What I wanted to ask you—"

"Lifting off?" Fiore felt a lump in his throat, causing him to pause. "But . . ."

"I mentioned the radiation before," said Vandermeer. "It's something new. Something we've never seen before. The lab's baffled, but one thing's for sure. The test animals are reacting adversely to its effects. I talked to Earth and they've ordered us to pull out. We're not equipped to adequately explore this situation. We have no choice now." Vandermeer got up, placing a consoling hand on Fiore's shoulder. Then as an afterthought he added: "You'll be interested in what Kirkland did in

your absence. He's got some new sites cleared, even though our time was cut short."

Fiore felt his emotions rise, mingled with confusion. They were taking him back without giving him a chance. He would be too old to return. He might live in Kirkland's shadow. He clasped and unclasped his hands.

"You do what you must do," he finally said.

"Good. I'm glad you're feeling better," said Vandermeer. "I'll send down some of Kirkland's reports." He opened the door and spoke to the guard before leaving. "C'mon DeSilva, we won't need you here any longer."

Their footsteps became echoes in the hallway, and Fiore got up from the bed and opened the door. *Yes, they're gone. Now I can think again.* Leaving the door ajar just a crack so he could hear anyone coming, he returned to his bed and put on his clothes. He had some difficulty with his boots; some of his coordination had been lost. Fully dressed, he stood up and left the cabin.

It was a short walk to the emergency escape hatch at the bottom of "C" deck. Up above he could hear some of the crew stowing gear. He paused to listen briefly before he stepped out in the alien night. There was a cool wind, which seemed to revive him.

Walking around by the remnants of the base camp, Fiore listened with a supernatural alert-

ness for any sign of the crew. There was none. He climbed into one of the tracs and started the engine. It made a soft growl, and he eased up from idle speed, feeling the smooth tug of the torque-converters. Slowly he moved away from the ship.

He used the trac's instruments to guide him through the night and after long minutes he pulled up in front of the temple. Although Kirkland had been back at the site, Fiore didn't notice much new excavation. He began to perspire freely as he leaped from the cab, looking up at the silhouette of the temple against the starry sky. Deep within its walls, they were waiting for him. He thought of the task that loomed before him.

Before descending into the temple he paused before a frieze of alien writings. He wore a mantle of intimacy as he pondered the runic symbols. He felt that he could now interpret their meaning. Everything seemed so much less confusing now. The beings were not really dead, said the ancient inscriptions, but only sleeping in wait of the arrival of other men. Waiting for men from the sky to bring them into new life. He smiled as he looked at the symbols.

He passed the great mural next to the entrance to the burial chamber and descended into the dank atmosphere. At the bottom, he looked over the remains.

"I am here!" he yelled, his

arms outstretched.

But they did not move. They did nothing to acknowledge his presence. Fiore ran from one dais to the other, carressing their hollow bones. He spoke to them. He whispered. He laughed. His telepathic powers told him of their presence in the room.

Suddenly he remembered Vandermeer and the others. When they found him missing, they would come after him.

He must hide.

Kirkland had spent the last day in the temple. Fiore wondered how familiar he had gotten with the internal areas. He switched on his lamp and followed another passage out of the burial chamber. He passed several chambers that appeared to be filled with armor, presumably belonging to the creatures. He came to a junction with four other passageways, two of them with stairways leading deeper into the temple. He chose one that would take him further away from the surface. He examined the dust on the stone steps. It appeared to be undisturbed. Most likely, Kirkland's men hadn't been through this part of the gigantic building.

Fiore walked through the darkness, led only by the small beam of his light. He passed other great rooms, more burial chambers. The subterranean area was a maze of intricate passageways, and Fiore was impressed with the magnificent engineering of the alien builders. The minutes passed, and

the atmosphere grew stale. Fiore stopped to rest in one of the stone corridors. *Must stay away from the Captain. Can't fall asleep.*

But he did.

HE AWOKE to a thundering echo that rumbled through the dark passage.

DOCTOR FIORE! THIS IS VANDERMEER. I KNOW YOU CAN HEAR MEEE!

He had expected them. They wanted to take him from his people and his appointed tasks.

WE HAVE FOUND YOUR TRAC. WE KNOW YOU ARE IN HERE. PLEASE COME OOUUUT!

The voice from the bullhorn was without inflection. Fiore imagined that it wasn't even Vandermeer speaking, but rather some machine the captain had sent to do his bidding.

Find me if you want me. He laughed and his laughter echoed wildly in the corridor. He hoped they would not hear it and cursed himself for it.

KIRKLAND IS HERE. HE WANTS—

Kirkland. One of the most dangerous. The first to doubt me, to deny me.

—TO TALK TO YOU! WE CAN NOT LET YOU STAY. THE SHIP MUST LEAVE SOON. PLEASE COME OUT. THE RADIATION WILL KILL YOU IF YOU STAAAAY.

Several minutes passed while Fiore sat in silence, his mind imagining a scene of Vandermeer's men scurrying about the ruins

with Kirkland. They would have their weapons drawn as if searching from some wild beast. Fiore snorted. *The fools! I am like a god to these people. I have come to claim the place for mankind. You can not stop me.*

WE CAN ONLY WAIT A SHORT TIME LONGER. I'M GIVING YOU ONE HOUR. I CAN'T RISK ANY MORE TIME THAN THAT. ONE HOUR, AND THAT'S ALLLLL.

The last word trailed off down through corridors and softly settled in his mind. Poor Vandermeer, who thought of time only in hours. Fiore was dealing with centuries. He consoled himself with the knowledge that he would soon be undisturbed.

The ancient inscriptions spoke of an Age of Righteousness that would come to the people. The age would begin when the beings were raised from the sleep of the dead. The ancient writings had explained so much for Fiore. They had made his task so much more clear. He was no longer confused over the strange sensations he had felt. He knew now that he was inexorably linked with the alien culture. Through Fiore, his world would live again.

He pointed his lamp at the stone wall opposite him. He used his mind to control the shape of the light, and he painted a great mural on the stone. He watched as the mural took shape, and he saw great throngs of golden people, carrying Fiore upon a crystal throne. In the distance, Fiore

could see the rising shafts of new cities being built. The sand of the desert had been replaced by lush forests.

He thought of Vandermeer and the scene vanished, leaving only the stone wall. He imagined confronting Vandermeer's men with a great army summoned up from the sarcophagi. He would be swift and merciless and revengeful. Nothing could stand in his way. He would—

THE HOUR IS UP, DOCTOR. I'M RECALLING MY MEN TO THE SHIP. YOU MUST COME NOW OR WE—

Now there is no need. They are leaving me.

—WILL HAVE TO LEAVE YOU. I'M ASKING YOU FOR THE LAST TIME. THIS IS IT.

The time had passed quickly as Fiore sat in silence. He could imagine the crew climbing back into the ship. He likened them to a virus, a disease, retreating under attack. Fiore would now be able to complete his work.

He arose from his huddling place and slowly groped his way through the corridors. Within an hour he was on the surface, standing amidst the columns and the gargoyles. He looked up at one of the stone creatures, and it now assumed a familiarity.

He heard a dull roar rolling across the bleak plain. He smiled, and looking up into the morning, he saw a thin flame climbing.

The ship was gone, Fiore was alone.

VANDERMEER HAD LEFT HIM enough food and water for ten days. By the following day, his hair was matted with dust and sweat, his beard gray and stubbled. The hot, dry silence of the ruins began to bother him, and he longed for a sound made by someone other than himself.

Things are not going as planned, he thought. The corpses remained dormant in their chambers, the meager food stores would eventually run out, and his enthusiasm was waning fast. But the worst part was the sickness that had slowly began to creep into him—destroying him from the inside out.

Three days after the ship had left, the severe attacks of nausea began, after each meal. He avoided them by refusing to eat, spending most of his time wandering about the passageways of the temple complex. He found enough corpses to form the army he had imagined, but they apparently didn't recognize him. He knew that with his strength ebbing away, he would have to eat; each time the nausea grew stronger, tearing out his guts.

On the fifth day, the headaches started. Severe and blinding, his vision faltered, his steps became unsure. His thinking became a series of jagged peaks, fragments of something once solid. That night, as he lay huddled in a dark corner, he felt a fever grip him. His skin became hot to the touch, but wrapped in a blanket against

the night, he shivered violently.

Something is wrong. I am going to die. Die.

The fever washed over him like the distant oceans of Earth. At times he was submerged beneath a tide of delusions—nightmarish nonsense intensified by the fire in his head. At other brief moments, his system fighting back, he felt himself rise up above the surface, and for quick instants, he could remember everything. The way it really was. The ship. Vandermeer. The alien bodies.

How strange, he thought during these brief flashes, that he should recognize such things, at such a time as this. How odd to know one's mistakes so very, very late.

But such times would pass quickly, and once again Fiore would be lost in a half-sleep of torment. The morning came without notice, but he awoke because he was thirsty. His stomach boiled as he drank, stinging his intestines because his body refused to accept the water.

Staggering from the attack, he stood up and approached the nearest sarcophagus. The mummified alien stared upward, ignoring him. Fiore reached out trembling hands, but the sickness was so deep within him that he could no longer control his movements. He stumbled into the dais, crashing into the skeleton, and tumbling it to the floor.

The remains exploded into dusty fragments at Fiore's feet.

No! No!

The recognition forced its way into his fading consciousness, as he stared down at the bones. There was nothing left now. He

climbed upon the sarcophagus, using his last remaining energy to lie down to die.

It is only fitting, he thought.

—THOMAS F. MONTELEONE

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91

GOOD SERVANTS ARE HARD TO FIND THESE DAYS

Former Associate Editor Carrington offers a pointed fable about companionship and its price . . .

GRANT CARRINGTON

"YOU KNOW, man, what you need is a chick," Eddie said.

Tom Gibbs pictured his apartment filled with dozens of yellow balls of down. It didn't appeal to him. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"A chick, man, you know." Eddie described a voluptuous female shape in the air with his plasteel hands. Eddie's face remained as expressionless as ever: it is hard to show emotion with a speaker grill and a strip of light-receptor.

Tom was relieved. "Yeah, yeah, maybe you're right."

"What do you say we go down to the City Lights Bookstore? Maybe Ferlinghetti has some nice beat little broad in his back room."

"Who?" Tom had lost Eddie's train of thought again.

"Ferlinghetti. You know. *Coney Island of the Mind*."

"*Coney Island of the Mind*?" Tom asked fearfully.

"The poet." If Eddie's face couldn't show emotion, his voice could. Domestic Robots Ltd. prided themselves on the flexibil-

ity of their robots' vocal boxes. Tom could attest to that; he almost expected Eddie to spit in disgust. "Man, you really are square," his robot companion said.

"Well, why don't we watch the robot fights instead?" Tom suggested.

Eddie's voice dripped sadness and disappointment in Tom Gibbs. "I don't wish to watch the fights any more. We beatniks don't believe in violence."

"Oh. Well, what would you like to do, then?"

"I believe I shall sit here and meditate on my karma." Eddie folded himself into a perfect padmasana and sat motionless on the floor, humming "om" softly to himself.

Tom shook his head sadly and turned on the threevy. He put earphones on to avoid bothering Eddie, wondering if the current itself would interrupt Eddie's electronic meditation. He envied Eddie's padmasana; Tom himself could barely get into sidhasana, much less lotus position. Only a week ago, he had never heard of

yoga; now, thanks to Eddie's sudden preoccupation with the Beatnik Era of American History, he had a small notoriety in the office for his knowledge of obscure religious sects.

Tom worried about that sudden interest of Eddie's. The robot companion had been an excellent friend for well over two months, acting as servant and conversationalist. Tom had let him use the Universal Catalog when Tom didn't need him, and Eddie had dipped into science, history, and literature before finally developing a fixation on the period of the semi-mythical Kerouac. Now, he had little time for Tom, who was getting—quite bored with the whole period.

He turned off the threevy and punched out the number of Domestic Robots Ltd.

"May I help you?" a pleasant female voice asked. The plastimask of a beautiful woman covered robotic features, but the eyes were a dead giveaway. There was no similarity between human eyes and optic lenses. Nor were the lips synchronized properly.

"Yes. I'd like to talk to someone about my robot. Number 5-1885."

"One moment please."

The robot disappeared from the screen, replaced by a commercial for the many models available from Domestic Robots Ltd., which itself was interrupted by the chubby salesman who had sold Eddie to Tom.

"Good evening, Mr. Gibbs.

How may I help you?"

"It's . . . it's about my robot companion."

The salesman looked down at a piece of computer printout. "Ah, yes, the 395 model. An excellent robot."

"Well, that's just it. I'm, ah, having a little trouble with him . . . it."

"Trouble." The salesman raised an eyebrow.

"Well, it's not much but, ah, it is a little, um, disconcerting."

The salesman's friendly manner was gone, replaced by a wary noncommittal one. "Well, what exactly seems to be the problem, Mr. Gibbs?"

"Well, the, uh, the robot . . . I call him Eddie . . ." The salesman nodded, lips pursed. "He seems to have this idea that he's, well, that he's a beatnik."

"A beatnik?"

"That's right."

The salesman paused a minute.

"What's a beatnik, Mr. Gibbs?"

"Well, it's some kind of a religious sect that held sway in the United States during the middle of the last century."

"I see." The salesman's fingers tapped out a pattern on his computer keyboard.—"Tell me, Mr. Gibbs, have you powered down your robot companion when you weren't using him?"

"Well, no."

"I see. Now if you'll remember correctly, Mr. Gibbs, I told you distinctly that the robot companion should not be left powered on

and unattended. It's also stated quite clearly in the owner's manual on several pages."

Tom squirmed in his chair. "I know, but he seems so human when he's . . . powered on, and so . . . so cold when . . ."

"You realize, don't you, that we can't take responsibility for any malfunction that occurs as a result of your not taking the proper precautions?"

"Uh, yes."

"It's stated in your warranty. Just a minute." The salesman looked at the printout on his computer. It was quite some time before he said, "I think we can fix the problem for you, Mr. Gibbs, but you'll have to bear the brunt of the expense."

"Uh, how much will it cost?"

"I can't give you a precise figure, but it should run somewhere between five hundred and a thousand nixons."

Tom gulped. It was steep, but he could afford it. "All right. What will you do?" he asked worriedly.

"We'll put a shunt into its circuits that will cause it to reject all information from the period 1950 to 1965. That's the peak period of the beatnik influence, according to our computer. Of course, we can't make it forget what it already knows, unless we do a complete erasure. Would you prefer that?"

"No. No, I don't think so."

"Right."

"What good will it do then if he

still remembers all this?"

"The shunt will cause the robot companion to reject it as meaningless data, thus keeping the companion from acting on it."

"I see."

"If you can bring your companion in tomorrow, we'll have it back to you within two weeks."

THE TWO WEEKS were hell for Tom without his robot companion. And they weren't made any easier by his supervisor, Frank Rose, a man who always wore gray suits that matched his hair and his smile.

"He didn't even tell me what happened," Tom had complained.

"They never do," Rose said, spitting out the pit from a small peach.

"Maybe he doesn't know. Maybe this is something new."

"Hah!" Rose picked up another peach from the plastic bag on his desk. "They know, all right. They just don't give a damn. You know how it is, Tom. There's no pride in workmanship any more."

"I guess not."

"Damn right." Rose bit into the peach, juice dribbling down his chin. "You know, there was a time when programmers gave a damn about their work, really took pride in it. Not any more. Why, I hear they deliberately put bugs in their programs now, just to see how much they can get away with." He wiped the juice off his chin.

"Then they do know how to fix

it?" Tom asked eagerly, hopefully.

Rose waved a hand listlessly. "What difference does it make? Something else will go wrong. I hear about it all the time. You know, I used to have a Mark One servant put out by IBM. Let me tell you, they knew how to make robots properly then. I should never have got rid of it." Rose shook his head sadly.

A bell chimed musically. Tom had one minute to get back to watching the dials and gauges on his console of the Red Bank Pollution Monitoring & Correction Plant.

"See you Tuesday," Rose said as he left.

AT LAST Domestic Robots Ltd. returned Eddie to Tom.

"Now, remember," the salesman had told him on the phone; "be sure to disconnect him when he's not in use. The 395 model is very sensitive and needs to be active at all times when it's powered on. When it's not in use, be sure to power down."

"I thought you had taken care of that," Tom whined.

"We've put in a fifteen-year shunt. Other years are still open for it to research."

"Okay," Tom said sullenly.

FOR TWO WEEKS, Tom followed instructions, though to see Eddie staying quietly in a corner, "dead," sent shivers of fear through him. He wondered if some day he would turn Eddie on

and there would be no response. He missed the warmth of Eddie plugged in to the library while he sat watching threevy.

He was halfway to work one morning before he realized that he had slipped, that he had said "goodbye" to Eddie as he used to do, forgetting to turn him off. It was too late to do anything about it. *Certainly, he rationalized to himself, a few hours won't make any difference.*

But when he came home, Eddie was sitting on the floor in a room empty of furnishings.

"Where's my chair, my threevy?" Tom asked anxiously.

Eddie looked up at him with that expressionless metal face. "You don't need them," he said calmly. "I have disposed of your material possessions."

Tom noticed a string of beads around Eddie's neck and a strange-looking medallion. "Where'd you get those?" he asked.

Eddie indicated the Universal Catalog. "You can get anything from that, Tom."

Tom sat down on the floor, staring at the carpet. It was a new one with some kind of Oriental motif. Eddie had chosen some strange, Oriental-sounding music that filled the room:

"Turn off your mind, relax, and float downstream."

"What's that music?" he asked.

"Beatles."

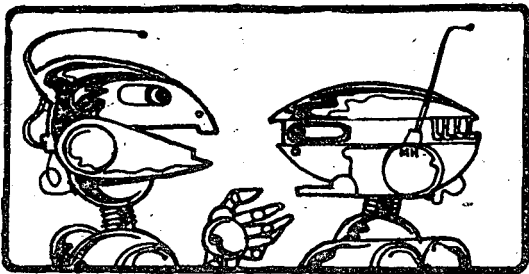
"Beatles?"

Eddie reached out to the con-

(cont. on page 119)

**SUSAN
WOOD**

**the
Clubhouse**



IT'S IRONIC. I've got a workable, perhaps definitive statement here, an answer to a debate that raged two years ago. It's made without a word.

Remember when every other fanzine editor and reviewer seemed to be talking about "graphic trips" and "package" fanzines, criticizing everyone else's layout and putting forward personal theories of the best visual means of presenting fan material? Remember when fanzines were packed full of beautiful artwork, with complicated, sometimes muddy, three-colour mimeo jobs that took a year to complete? Remember when fanzines arrived in all sorts of odd shapes, sideways and upside-down, with mimeoed bits and offset, over-reduced bits, bits that folded out and bits that dropped out? Some were beautiful, some were almost impossible to read. None "worked" completely, with a format at once esthetically pleasing and functional.

By and large, we're back in the age of the small, unpretentious, easy-to-produce personalzine. The

fanartists seem to have gafiated, or turned pro. Bill Bowers, certainly, is applying his commercial-art classes to the production of an increasingly-attractive *Outworlds*. But other designers have gafiated, or turned to simpler packages: a page of text, a simple title, maybe a Rotsler cartoon. The emphasis is on the word again, not the space it occupies.

And into this Age of Basics comes: **PECULIAR #8/ CARANDAITH 8** (Paul Novitski, 1690 East 26 Ave., Eugene, OR 97430. Irregular, mimeo; \$1 or the usual. December, 1973)

Alpajpuri/Paul was one of the chief graphics experimenters, concerned equally with the messages words conveyed, and their role as visual elements on a page. The last *Carandaith* appeared over a year ago. What's he been doing since then, refining the Perfect Layout?

There's a Grant Canfield cover: blue artwork, green title, on lilac paper. Nice, but not outstanding.

Open the zine. A variation on a yin-yang symbol: a flower and a black omega symbol, centred on attractive goldenbrown fibre paper. Simple design, porous paper and heavy inking give it a rough, woodcut effect. Beautiful. Flip the page, and—hey! A Table of Contents in blue-and-gold stripes? No, strips. On the left-hand page, a by-line and short paragraph of introduction for each item; on the right, titles in attractive blue ink, each simultaneously forming a table of contents and a page heading. Staggered page sizes, from the full 8½" by 11" down to 8½" by 5¼", and alternating colours, give each contribution its own physical section within the magazine. On first impression, then, *Peculiar* is unique, attractive, and functional.

The different page sizes are a thought-out experiment, not a gimmick. The first, smallest section presents, in strip form, a Mike Gilbert cartoon, "The Terrified computer". Like Paul, I find it "almost completely incomprehensible," but fun.

The presentation of the other material is equally effective. A serious science article, "Interstellar Migration and the Population Problem," follows the cartoon. Garrett Hardin examines the idea of extraterrestrial colonization as an outlet for our surplus population: the impulses behind it (primarily an opposition to "artificial" birth control, plus faith in "the new religion called Progress"); the costs involved (the re-

moval of one day's population increment would cost an estimated 369 billion dollars); and the human problems on board the colony-spacecraft. It's a clear, reasoned, and scary analysis—more scary when you read that it's reprinted from the *Journal of Heredity*, from 1959. Paul lets it speak for itself, an uncluttered text with only one small cartoon amid the bibliography. And immediately, zap, we're back in this world, rambling with Jonh Ingham (hey, we've missed ya!) through London, Greece and Turkey, gazing at mountains and Ingham cartoons.

The page-universe expands, and we're in Middle Earth. Doug Barbour examines "the sense of history," Tolkein's creation of a world in which "the story-teller, as well as the participants in the story, are aware that the landscape through which they travel is peopled with ghosts," while the reader realizes the richness and complexity of the trilogy's background. And finally, "How to Tell Schoenberg From Christ" by "Becker Staus" is an attempt at Monty Pythonish humour of the incongruous and irrelevant which doesn't work—though I liked the meditation section. Again, layout is simple, with only one, appropriate drawing in the bibliography of the serious section, and fannish cartoons through the humour piece.

At which point, *Peculiar* has expanded to full size, presenting us with a wry Angus Taylor poem,

and . . . wha? Suddenly it's upside down. And backwards. In fact, it's a whole new fanzine, the personal-fannish part, beginning with a Jay Kinney cover. There's the yin-yang symbol again; and a long, compartmentalized lettercol containing intelligent discussions of Tolkein, fanhistory, graphics, and various other topics. Best of all, there's "Pogo," Paul's editorial, reminiscent of *Foolscap* (reviewed last issue) in subject and in the high quality of the writing. Paul discusses the changes in his physical and mental/emotional location since, as Alpajpuri in Ocean Park, he published *Carandaith* #7 over a year ago. He concludes by discussing just why he bothers with complex layouts: "I publish *Carandaith/Peculiar* primarily for myself and those few who *do* really enjoy [my experiments]. For me, publishing a magazine is just another art form like drawing or fictioning, and I'm not going to limit what I create just because many people won't notice or care. The contents of this issue, for example, are so varied in topic and style and outlook that I doubt very many people besides myself will enjoy all of it. But that's not my problem . . . With an editude like that, it's obvious I'm not going to produce a commercially viable magazine Real Soon Now—nor do I really have any desire to do so, except that it would be fun to earn my living this way."

"Varied" is certainly an apt description for *Peculiar*. The main

section reminds me of a "paced" album, alternating rock and ballads, serious and fannish material. Each section has a different appeal and impact, and Paul's physical presentation enhances this. Each item, even each compartment of the lettercol, has its own unity within the whole magazine. The entire package is unified by the high quality of the material, and Paul's obvious respect for it, which leads him to present it as attractively and meaningfully as possible. Quibble: the fanzine *isn't* held together by its staples; and no zine so concerned with the visual should omit an art index. Apart from that, it's a good-looking, good-reading package. I hope the next issue doesn't take another year.

PREHENSILE #11 (Mike Glycer, 14974 Osceola St., Sylmar, CA 91342. Quarterly, offset; 85pp., 50¢.)

Mike Glycer shatters a fanzine production myth in *Prehensile* #11.

A fannish truism holds that offset printing is impersonal and cold, "not fannish" because the fanned entrusts his repro to other hands instead of painstakingly slipsheeting and collating by himself, usually because he wants to increase his printrun drastically; because he ends up with a "professional" look associated with slick magazines; because, generally, he wants to produce a fanzine to *sell*, a fanzine for buyers, not himself.

Prehensile #11 looks like a "little mag." The cover, neatly lettered, proclaims serious scientific contents: "sf & genre disease," "'73 worldcon report," "sf book & movie reviews." Inside are 85 8½" by 5½" clean white pages of black microelite type, neat headings, pleasant little bits of art, serious-looking articles on—the fan Hugos? the Torcon Ranquet at MacDonald's? the latest fanzines? *Pre* has a fannish soul!

Mike, in his editorial, talks about the sale of fanzines in bookstores, and acknowledges that his cover was designed to attract the money-paying browser. Not that he wants to make a fortune, but "it induces a sense of strangeness when I realize that paying for auto insurance has actually delayed the issuing of this *Pre*." Yet at the same time he reassures his readers who were horrified by his first offset issue, that the zine "remains, to borrow a phrase, 'a tournament in autobiography.'" In general, it reflects my developing interests in science fiction books and movies, criticism, writing, fantastic art, fandom, and fan-to-fan muttering. (The new offset package reflects my dislike of spending dozens of hours cranking the mimeo and collating the copies.) In specific, each contributor joins the tournament with his interests, and therefore *Pre*'s personality is never controlled by a firm self-preconception, but is redefined every issue."

This issue's personality is the

compleat fan. Darrell Schweitzer is serious about not defining sf. Richard Wadholm is serious about creativity, the problem of the artist dying physically before he's "written out," or dying artistically before he's finished producing. Don Keller reviews two anthologies; Bill Warren, sf movies; and various others talk about sf books and records. (Richard Wadholm on the new Hawkwind album: "Tangerine Dream they're not, but as far as homework music goes, they're more atmospheric than Hendrix.")

Then Mike Glicksohn relaxes with a pile of new fanzines in "The Zineophobic Eye," an excellent but jinxed column that's had three Canadian fanzines fold under it before Glycer asked for it, an act "much akin to the lemming who decided to go along with the crowd just to see where the action was." *Pre* also accompanies Lou Stathis to his old public school to talk about sf to sixth-graders. The account is well-written, funny, and thought-provoking too: just how *do* you get sf's sense of wonder across to bored little kids?

Finally, *Pre* goes inside Glycer's head, emerging with a funny parody of *The Guns of Avalon* and some comments on made-in-LA movies, before going off to the Torcon. The conreport is detailed, but makes all the names and events interesting. ("Hochberg and Stathis cruised by and we looked at each other like refugees from West Side Story whose walls had been stolen and were left

with nothing to lean up against and affect being cool.”) Mike Glycer is a good writer and editor, who assembles a fine lettercol and a pleasing variety of articles in a genzine that gets better every issue. Any browser who does pick up *Prehensile* #11 at Fred Patten’s bookstore will get a good personal introduction to fandom.

FANTASIAE, vol. 2, no. 1 (Ian M. Slater, The Fantasy Association, P.O. Box 24560, Los Angeles, CA 90024. Monthly, offset; 14pp., 12/3. January, 1974)

One advantage of good offset printing is that it can provide high-quality reproduction of detailed artwork. *Fantasiae* makes full use of this potential.

The newsletter of the Fantasy Association is small (10 to 16 pages each issue), frequent (it’s been maintaining a regular monthly schedule), and breathtaking. The title page is divided into thirds containing a gorgeous heading by Alicia Austin; a fantasy drawing by Paula Marmor, illustrating a George MacDonald story; and an informative column about MacDonald by Mary McDermott Shidler. Previous front pages using this basic format, have featured striking artwork by Austin, Kirk, Trimble, Marmor, Barr and Pearson, as well as reprinted fantasy art—occasionally on covers, consistently in interiors. I suppose a purist should object, demanding original work throughout; but I

appreciate, for example, editor Slater’s revival of “The Enchanter,” first published in 1920.

Fantasy has always seemed to me to be a more visual genre than sf. I don’t mean to be dogmatic about this, so don’t start typing out definitions for me; I’ve just found that good sf makes me experience other realities physically and emotionally, while good fantasy makes me visualize them, down to the last jewel on a sword-hilt or crimson banner. *Fantasiae* confirms this prejudice, complementing or perhaps even overwhelming the written material with wondrous artwork.

Which is not to say that the verbal contents aren’t impressive. Back issues have featured lead-off articles by Lloyd Alexander, Poul Anderson, Donald Wollheim, Peter Beagle, Katherine Kurtz and David Gerrold. Too pro-oriented? Perhaps—and the newszine does seem, inevitably, impersonal. Still, there’s a monthly editorial, reviews of fantasy fanzines as well as books, convention listings, and a letter-column. There are also articles by fans—this issue, an annoying discussion of fantasy art reprints which sets the reader faunching for Kay Nielsen posters and such, without giving any indication of where to send for them, not even an address for such obscure publishers as “Green Tiger Press.” Have pity on artlovers who live in Regina!

My other quibbles are also visual ones. The letters are printed

(reduced by ⅓) just as readers submit them; this produces an aggravating variation in typefaces and, more important, legibility. And the advantages of commercial offset are limited by the printers' lack of care; too often, heavy black areas reproduce as mottled grey, or are so overinked that detail is lost. Nevertheless, FANTASIAE is both attractive and informative.

RED PLANET EARTH, vol. 1, no. 2: A Magazine of American Indian Science Fiction (Craig Strete, 140 Meyer Ave., Dayton, Ohio 45431 or R.R. 1, Box 208, Celena, Ohio 45822. Irregular, mimeo; 32 pp., 50¢ or response. March, 1974)

This issue of *Red Planet Earth* contains a simple editorial: "Stories are more important than editorials. Therefore this shall be very short. This issue is dedicated to the memory of those who gave their lives in the service of their people. Long live the American Indian Movement." It also contains five stories, with a common element of violence; and an angry, hostile editorial. This makes for uncomfortable reading, especially if you're a white liberal, and some soul-searching: why the violence of act and emotion?

As Craig Strete points out in the first *Red Planet*, "No other culture has a solidier base for writing science fiction than American Indians. We are one of the few races who have actually experienced an alien invasion. They

were called pilgrims." Physical takeover was followed by imposition of alien cultural values, so that writers, including sf writers, present "highbrow liberal" images of Indians as "all wise, or so very, very noble. . . . When it comes to science fiction, ecology, buffalo appreciation and beaded work, we're always the good guys."

Craig and his friends publish *Red Planet* to present "some Indians writing about Indians. They don't write like white people because they aren't like white people. They speak with bits and pieces of other cultures running across their tongues. It may sound strange. If so, we blame it on the aliens, and it isn't us that's them." They've published something they believe in, with almost no money or equipment; and have received a lot of discouragement, from English department inhabitants and fans alike, and some destructive criticism from at least one sf pro.

OK: so the anger, the often-crude humour and some of the attitudes, especially towards women, are off-putting. (Why did John Diyohli turn "Gods Who Could Not Stay" into a cheap joke?) So the writing, like any early attempt at fiction, needs polish. But as an English department type and sf freak, I think that *Red Planet Earth* is worth taking seriously. Craig Strete and Ben Little Shoulder, especially, know how to tell a story, hitting your imagination and emotions. As a fan, I suggest You Out There send the *Red Planet* in-

habitants fanzines, constructive suggestions on everything from printing to story construction—and some quarters wouldn't hurt, either. As the editorial concludes: "Science fiction is a rich field. If other cultures could be infused into it, it could be even richer. Where are the black science fiction writers? There must be a reason." That reason shouldn't be mutual ignorance or mistrust, any more.

QUO-DAVIS: A fanzine to honor Hank Davis on the occasion of his 30th birthday (Moshe Feder, 142-34 Booth Memorial Ave., Flushing NY 11355. Oneshot, mimeo; 35 pp., available "for the cost of postage at the strict discretion of the publisher." February, 1974)

This special oneshot presents fourteen New York fen in tribute to a Kentucky fan turned NY pro, Hank Davis. Some of the contributions are slight, some are forced, and many are overly in-jokish for general fannish consumption; but there's some good humour here too. My favourites include: "The Mimeo Man," by Eli Cohen and Debbie Notkin, a successful fannish parody of "The Music Man." Watch for Professor A.B. Dick, Marian of the Asimov Public Library, and "Seventy-six genzines led the *Locus* poll' at the next Philcon.

—"The Horny Slime Fiends of Rotsnatch IV" by "L.J. Stathis, PhD," a thoroughly disgusting parody of those old sensawonder

stories. It's complemented by a magnificent parody cover by Steve Stiles, featuring Our Hero, bespectacled Space Cadet Hank Davis; a scantily-clad female; and the Slime Thing, Wimp.

—"By the Book" by Mose Feder, a thought-provoking parody of a robot operating manual, for humans.

—and, especially, "Getting to the Heart of the Matter," by Jerry Kaufman, a brilliant parody of faannish writing styles as different fans report Lee Hoffman's COA for *Pith*, "the zine that gets to the heart of the matter."

Is parody the trufannish genre?

MOEBIUS TRIP #19—or, THE SF ECHO, Meobius Trip Library #19 (Edward C. Connor, 1905 N. Gale, Peoria, ILL. 61604; quarterly, mimeo; 165 pp., 75¢, 3/\$2, 5/\$3. January, 1974)

Thanks to mail and tax regulations, a fanzine may want to call itself something else. *Moebius Trip* has become a book, or rather a "fantome"—a term coined by lexicon-lover Walt Liebscher. It measures 4¼" by 7" with a wrap-around cover gluing the package together. It was mimeoed on legal-size paper, and then cut, collated and bound by the editor. The work involved is staggering; Connor says it took 18 hours just to cut the paper for the previous issue. Why? Other editors have responded to the new US postal regulations by publishing smaller, more frequent, often more personal zines. Connor, however,

seems to prefer the larger, fairly impersonal *genzine*, with little editorial comment and page after page of serious, sf-oriented articles. The only graphics experiment is four pages of uninspiring artwork on blue paper; and they aren't even used to separate sections. Fortunately, the reproduction is excellent, the editor was unable to get his hands on an eye-straining microelite typer, and, given the small page size, the solid chunks of words don't become hard to read.

This issue, like all the rest, contains some fannish material. Walt Liebscher translates bits of Wagner's Ring plot into spoonerisms, which should be read aloud by the nimble-tongued for best effect. Don Ayres, reporting on Torcon, provides more than the usual wealth of detail given in most con reports (I ate such-and-such with so-and-so): He gives a real feeling of what attending the worldcon was like, and makes the people he met come alive. Larson E. Glicksohn, Mike's boa, seems to have made the greatest impression.

Moebius Trip generally gives me an impression of high-quality cerebral activity. The articles which will fill the lettercol of #20 with intelligent response are "Aldiss 'n' That" by Paul Walker, and "Getting A-Long With Heinlein" by Philip José Farmer.

The former appears, at first, to be one of Walker's mail-interviews with sf pros. Aldiss, however, rejected Walker's con-

clusions about his work, thereby raising the perennial problem of the validity of criticism. Walker presents his analysis for debate, since even "if it is not accurate to Aldiss, it remains an accurate account of *my* view of him and what he thought during the past decade." The dialogue consists of quotations from Aldiss' work, plus "an interpretive extrapolation of his thought as I saw it in his work," with questions from a character called "Antagonist."

Farmer's essay is basically a rebuttal of Dick Lupoff's criticisms of *Time Enough For Love* in *Algol* #20; but it also involves an analysis of Heinlen's work and ideas; predicts the emergence of a third Heinlein who will neither ignore nor over-emphasize sex; and discusses writing as a therapeutic art. Unfortunately, Farmer was hospitalized before he could revise and elaborate the article. What he says is interesting; what remains to be said in future issues is more so.

In sum, *Moebius Trip* not only looks like a book, but has something of a book's formality and, perhaps, permanence. It tends to discuss ideas, rather than people. The editor contributes his labour, rather than his personality; the writers contribute their intelligence to the study of science fiction. *Recommended.*

T-NEGATIVE #22 (Ruth Berman, 5620 Edgewater Blvd., Minneapolis, MINN. 55417; irregular, mimeo; 38 pp., 50¢, 5/\$2.

January, 1974)

This is the longest-lived *Star Trek* fanzine, and that says it all. I could talk about the writing, which is generally good. I could talk about the contents, which range from a serious discussion of "Ritual in the *Kraith* Universe" by Joyce Yasner, to an imaginative short story, "The USS Enterprise," by John and Sandra Miesel. But either you care about material like reviews of the new *Star Trek* cartoon show, or you don't. *T-Negative* addresses itself to a specific subfandom, exclusively and well.

MEANWHILE, Down Under . . .

Australian fandom is preparing to host the 1975 Worldcon. To prepare North Americans for the event, the next *Clubhouse* will feature reviews of Australian fanzines (those that survive the three-month boat trip and the Canadian postal strike). Meanwhile, whether you're pawning your mimeo for a trip to Melbourne or just wondering what Aussiefen are like, invest in "Lesleigh's Adventures Down Under (And What She Found There)," Lesleigh Luttrell's illustrated account of her DUFF trip. It costs a dollar (all proceeds to this year's DUFF(race) from: 525 W. Main, Madison, WIS 53703.

OTHER FANZINES:

ALIEN CRITIC #8 (Richard E. Geis, P.O. Box 11408, Portland,

OR 97211. Quarterly, mimeo; 49 pp., \$1. February, 1974)

ASH-WING #13 (Frank Denton, 14654-8th Ave. SW, Seattle, WA 98166. Irregular, mimeo; 44 pp., contributions/responses. February, 1974) *Ashwing* is "the sort of fanzine that just keeps rolling on with whatever my current thoughts are and depends a great deal on the sort of material I get." The material is surprisingly good (fanfic, which normally I dislike) to excellent (Michael Carlson's account of a Virginia college, the editor's ramblings). Book reviews, humour, an article on Mervyn Peake, an interesting lettercol, impeccable mimeo—recommended.

BANSHEE#7 (Michael Gorra, 199 Great Neck Rd., Waterford, CT 06385. Irregular, mimeo; 32 pp., 60¢. March, 1974) A promising fanzine: it opens with a funny account of baking bread by Mike Glicksohn, and continues through some Big Names (Tucker, Katz) and some well-known ones (Chauvin, Svoboda). Unfortunately, good material loses out to mediocre artwork and mimeoing.

ECCE vol. 2 no. 2 (Roger D. Sween, P.O. Box 351, Platteville, WI 53818. Quarterly, offset; 48 pp., 75¢.) Rather dull academically-oriented reviews: most interesting is a "round robin" discussion of *Future Quest*, an Elwood anthology; most pointless, a superficial account of "what

is wrong with" a story I've never heard of, with no clues as to author, publisher, etc. Also included SPECULATIVE LITERATURE BIBLIOGRAPHY #2: Reference Sources for the Study of Speculative Literature, compiled by Roger D. Sween, 48pp., 50¢; useful, if incomplete.

CORBETT #5 (David and Beth Gorman, 337 N. Main St., New Castle, IN 47362. Irregular, mimeo; 24pp., 50¢, 5/\$2. February, 1974) Notable for an exchange (conversation?) between Harlan Ellison and Sheryl Smith on sexism in his sf; and for a continuing "back-to-the-land" discussion, with Juanita Coulson providing down to earth (sorry) comments on the nutritive values of potatoes. Fanzines are fascinating sources of information.

GODLESS #6 (SP4 Bruce D. Arthurs, 527-98-3103, 57th Trans. Co., Fort Lee, VA 23801. Irregular, mimeo; 26 pp., 35¢ February, 1974) Reviews, and an appreciation of the "Darkover" books, with a useful bibliography from Mirion Zimmer Bradley.

KARASS #3 (Linda Bushyager, 1614 Evans Ave., Prospect Park, PA 19076. Monthly, mimeo; 12 pp., 25¢, 5/\$1. March, 1974)

News, opinion, reviews.

KYBEN #6 (Jeff Smith, 4102-301 Potter St., Baltimore, MD 21229. Irregular, mimeo; 26 pp., 35¢, 3/\$1. January, 1974) Eclectic: reviews sf, mysteries, music. Highlight: Paula Marmor's hedgehogs.

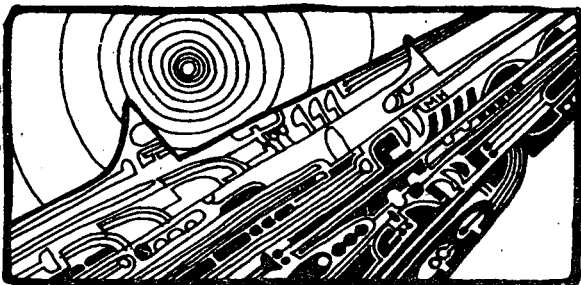
OUTWORLDS #19 (Bill and Joan Bowers, P.O. Box 148, Wadsworth, Ohio 44281. Quarterly, offset; 44pp., \$1, 4/\$4. March, 1974) Humour, including "An Eohumor Triad" of Entropy Reprints; commentary, including Poul Anderson on the future of sf and Doc Lowndes on H.P. Lovecraft; fine artwork, especially Steve Fabian's Page and Grant Canfield's robots; White vs Anthony vs. . . ; good letters; interesting graphics: the ultimate fanzine.

WILD FENNEL #8 (P.W. Frames, 205-A West Holly, Bellingham, WA 98225. Irregular, offset on newsprint; 23 pp., 25¢) Assorted pleasant ramblings including Pauline Palmer on Jacques Plante, former goalie for the Montreal Canadiens hockey team—now that's esoteric! Fiction, poetry, Daniel Say interviewing D.G. Compton, artwork, and some excellent graphics including a Pauline Palmer collage. Enjoyable.

SUSAN WOOD

WATCH FOR THE DETAILS OF THE BIG
50th ANNIVERSARY OF AMAZING STORIES
in the Next issue of AMAZING STORIES

the Future in Books



Robert Silverberg, ed.: *CHAINS OF THE SEA: Three Original Novellas of Science Fiction*, Nelson, 1973, 182 pp. Hardcover, SF Book Club edition, \$1.49.

I suppose that one should call this book an anthology even though it contains only three stories, each of novella length. But it is actually more than that. *Chains of the Sea* is a showcase for three young already successful sf writers, and it is also an indicator of the literary directions that sf will be taking in the seventies. This does not imply, however, that the three writers represented, Geo. Alec Effinger, Gardner R. Dozois, and Gordon Eklund, are all similar writers, all travelling in the same direction. Actually the contrary is true. Effinger, Dozois, and Eklund each speak with a distinctive, different voice. All three emphasize different things: all three employ different literary techniques.

"And Us, Too, I guess," by Effinger, leads off the book with a variation on the standard sf theme of impending world catastrophe.

As usual, Effinger's prose is almost flawless, exhibiting careful control of language. The plot is a simple one, in which all the living beings on the planet begin dying off, species by species, in a random but lethal sequence. The point of view is shared by two characters, one a prosaic, parody-ridden scientist, the other a simple middle-class citizen. Much of the tone of the novella is conveyed through Effinger's personal brand of satire, flavored by occasional doses of cynicism. The scientist is a pastiche of the serious, latter-day Thomas Edisons of thirties and forties sf; the middle-class working man is a vicious portrayal of suburban banality.

The story left me with mixed emotions. The narration, while smooth and competent, comes off very flat. Effinger does not seem to be doing anything well in this story that he hasn't done before in stories of more substantial content. There is an existential, morose quality about the story that doesn't allow it to be very enjoyable to read. Some of the satirical sequences are tired simply

because Effinger continues to satirize things that have already had their full share of rib-poking. I mean, do we really need more jabs at the absent-minded professor who pursues inanities simply because they are there?

The more I read of Effinger's work, the more I keep asking myself an important question: when is this author going to stop hiding his real feelings and emotions behind a veil of satire and subtle parody? When will Effinger begin to seriously examine man's relationship and place in the universe? Isn't that what sf is supposed to be all about? Effinger is a talented writer. He certainly has the ability to accomplish these things, but I don't feel that he has done it yet.

Gardner Dozois, on the other hand, seems to be achieving this goal, which is illustrated by his fine story, "Chains of the Sea." Dozois' writing has always contained a rich tapestry of human feelings—that is highly personal and at the same time very universal. The protagonist of the tale, Tommy, illustrates this. He is a young boy whose feelings and actions are real and familiar.

The plot, like Effinger's, is also a standard one in science fiction—the invasion of aliens. The treatment is, however, very different from all the ones which have preceded it. Dozois attempts, by implication and subtle statement, to explain a myriad of bizarre occurrences of the Frank

Edwards variety. His explanations are valid and rationally conceived, and they all come together to depict a frightening possibility of the Earth being populated by other beings, invisible to us, but who are far more advanced physically and ethically.

Some humans are sensitive enough to perceive these beings, and Tommy is one of them. When the aliens appear, seeking out these other intelligences upon the Earth (which include an enormous computer network), the small boy is aware of these actions. The plot unfolds through a shared viewpoint of both the small boy and an omniscient narrator: each point of view complimenting the other in terms of information and feeling.

Dozois is a serious writer who is obviously not afraid to reveal his own perceptions about the world. Although the resolution of the tale is down-beat, one gets the impression that such an ending is somehow okay. This is because Dozois is convincing in his descriptions and his conveyance of mood. If he has any major fault, it lies in his predilection for large paragraphs of pure description. In fact, Dozois' stories rarely contain much dialogue or straightforward character development. Much of what one learns about Dozois' characters, interesting as they may be, is *told* rather than *shown* to us. In spite of this, "Chains of the Sea" remains as a sensitive, intelligent, and honest display of the human condition. It is unfor-

tunate that it appeared so late in the year (1973), since it will probably miss out on the chance to receive much consideration for the Nebula or Hugo awards: it certainly deserves notice for both of them.

The last story, "The Shrine of Sebastian" by Gordon Eklund, also borrows from past themes and plot devices, but manages to handle them with originality. I am a sucker for sf which deals with religious themes, and I'm sure that's part of the reason why I enjoyed this one. Unfortunately, I kept being reminded of an earlier story by Anthony Boucher called "The Quest for Saint Acquin," and I'm willing to bet Eklund was in some way influenced by Boucher's tale. There are many similarities between the two, although they differ in treatment and overall theme.

The setting is far-future world in which man has gone out to other worlds, leaving behind only a small segment of humanity and a massive population of robots. The plot is basically a "trek" in which the main characters experience several encounters which gradually piece together the questions and problems that carry the action.

The real merit of the story is in the language and the pleasant, sustained mood that is carried throughout the narrative. This is possible because Eklund's characters are real beings, their actions and their speech is natural, their

perceptions honest and believable. And beneath the surface of the narrative, Eklund manages to plant important questions, such as: Is the ability to love a uniquely human trait? Can religion ever be more than an "opiate for the people"? Are the distinctions between the human and the non-human as clearly defined as once imagined? Of course, such questions cannot be answered satisfactorily in one short novella, yet Eklund succeeds in making a strong case for his own feelings on the issues.

In his introduction to the book, Silverberg states that all three writers are a product and a reflection of the seventies. Perhaps for this reason all of their tales share several characteristics in spite of their diverse plots and themes. All three novellas, although Eklund's *less* than the other two, provide a rather dreary view of man. The writers' opinions that there are very few good things to talk about concerning modern man are revealed in these stories. Their stories are sobering commentaries on our age, and in a sense, it is unfortunate that this must be so.

—Thomas F. Monteleone

Editor's note: Both Eklund and Effinger published their first stories in our companion magazine, FANTASTIC; with Dozois they comprise the newest "generation" of sf writers. The devotion of a book of this nature to

the work of three "young" writers is significant when one considers the conservatism and reliance upon "Big Names" in the book publishing field.—tw

Roger Zelazny: *THE GUNS OF AVALON*, Doubleday, New York, 1972, 180 pp., hardback, \$5.95

The Guns of Avalon is the sequel to *Nine Princes in Amber*, and is to be followed by two or three more books in the same series. Doubleday has marketed these books as "science fiction", but they are fantasy, although of an unconventional sort—as one might expect from Roger Zelazny. They are fun books, enjoyable stories, but are mere light entertainment and not a series that will be looked back upon in future years as a classic.

The Guns of Avalon is told in the first person by Corwin, one of the nine princes of Amber, after he has escaped from the dungeon of his brother Eric and is attempting to find a way to regain the throne of Amber. He is journeying through "shadow" when he comes upon a wounded knight lying in the grass with six other dead men around him. He stops and helps the wounded knight, and becomes involved in the affairs of the kingdom this knight serves. Corwin's string of adventures and intrigue takes off from there, and the reader rarely gets a chance to stop and catch his breath.

Amber is the only 'true' world in the book—all the other worlds, Avalon included, are shadow worlds. Zelazny adopts for use in this novel the science fictional concept of alternate or parallel worlds—or shadow worlds, as he calls them—of which there are an infinite variety. Immortals like Corwin possess the ability to shift from one shadow world to another. "We select a possibility and walk until we reach it," says Corwin. This is one of the more inventive, unconventional aspects of the novel.

Another is the novel's humor. Much of Zelazny's fiction has had a lot of offhand humor and wit, and since *The Guns of Avalon* is simply a fast-action adventure without any serious pretensions, Zelazny has indulged himself in this regard more than usual—which makes the novel much more enjoyable, in my opinion. The humor comes in part from the incongruity of present day slang and the archaic expressions often common in epic fantasy novels mixed together in equal amounts. Earth, you see, is also one of the shadow worlds of Amber—and Corwin has spent 600 years living here, which gives Zelazny a good excuse for using slang.

Some of the humor also comes from Zelazny's outrageous imagery, which is used playfully in this novel: "The sky was brass and the sun a mushy apple. The wind was a panting dog with bad breath."

There is such a chuckle-inducing quality about the novel that you can't help but wonder if this isn't really a satire. Zelazny's way of gently poking fun at the epic fantasy genre. I think not, but it's a book that's not meant to be taken seriously. Certainly, the fantasy purists will hate it.

The novel has flaws. Zelazny's description of Corwin's journey through the shadows on pages 98-101 is stream-of-consciousness in approach, and does not work particularly well within the context in which it is set. It contains some striking imagery, however. The characters in *The Guns of Avalon* are not well-realized individuals, either, not even Corwin. For instance, after reading the entire novel I still do not have any idea of what Corwin looks like.

But do these things matter, if the novel is meant to be simply light entertainment? That's a hard question to answer. Let's just say that since the novel is meant to be light entertainment, these flaws detract less from the reader's enjoyment than they would otherwise. In a novel with serious intentions—such as Zelazny's own *Dream Master*—they would be fatal. And flaws they still are, for *The Guns of Avalon* would have been better without them.

Goodness is relative. One "good" novel can be inferior to another "good" novel. Thus when I say that *The Guns of Avalon* is heartily recommended, do not go

to your nearest bookstore or library and expect a work the equal of *A Wizard of Earthsea* or *The Lord of the Rings*. Zelazny's book is a step removed from the standard sword & sorcery clichés in style and approach; but it is less than brilliant. You will be entertained, but not emotionally moved.

—Cy Chauvin

William Jon Watkins: *CLICKWHISTLE*, Doubleday, New York, 1973 179 pages, Hardcover, \$4.95.

Intelligence in dolphins has been a much disputed and researched subject recently; it is an idea that is intriguing and yet disruptive. It should have been a rich topic for science fiction for a long time, but strangely it has not. Aside from an early juvenile novel by Clarke, a short story or two, and the recent book-cum-film, *The Day of the Dolphin*, there have been very few science fiction works which explore the notion of dolphin intelligence.

William Jon Watkins has recognized this and the result is *Clickwhistle*, an ambitious offering which tries to portray the dolphin's legendary affinity to mankind in a sensitive, but complex manner. The action takes place in a not completely believable or well-constructed future society where the world is basically divided into two hemispheres—us and them. Our entire hemisphere

is ruled by one man, called "His Excellency," who is ruthless and omnipotent; but Watkins fails to show how either characteristic in the man can be believed. At odds with His Excellency and his various minions is a noted dolphinologist named Pearson, who has established an almost mystical communication with the dolphins.

There are several plots which wind through the novel: one concerning the human tensions and conflicts (easily the weaker of the two), the other concerning the primal conflict of the dolphins and their enemy, the killer whale. The human characters are stiff and antiseptically drawn for the most part. Watkins views them from a distance, not really caring about them, and using standard stereotypes to carry them along. Many of their actions and words are predictable and unimaginative. The dolphin characters, on the other hand, are extremely well-done, each one a distinctive, well-realized person. Each dolphin exists in the mind of every other dolphin; they are part of a group-mind which, Watkins tells us, has come from a distant star somewhere in the galaxy. The killer whales also share a group-mind oneness and they are also aliens who have come to Earth to pursue their natural enemy, the "dolphins."

The entire description of the dolphins' existence is modelled loosely after the concepts of Gestalt psychology, which states that

the sum of the parts is greater than the whole. Watkins uses this approach to examine the myriad experiences of the many dolphin characters through the protagonist's, ie. Clickwhistle's, point of view. Pearson and the other humans become mere pawns under Clickwhistle's direction; and this relationship eventually results in a resolution of cosmic proportions.

The problem lies in the manner in which Watkins presents his climax and denouement. The pacing of action and talk scenes breaks down during the final chapters as the author gives the reader a lengthy lecture on various aspects of a Gestalt *weltanschauung*, Eastern religion and philosophy, galactic history, and the cyclical nature of the universe. It appears that things got away from him near the end, and it's too bad. *Clickwhistle* is a good, but flawed, book. I admire Mr. Watkins for what he attempted to do, and I hope that his next offering fulfills the promise he showed in this one.

—Thomas F. Monteleone

Ben Bova, editor: THE SCIENCE FICTION HALL OF FAME, vols. 2A and 2B, Doubleday, 529 pp. and 527 pp., \$9.95 each.

The first volume of The Science Fiction Hall of Fame was edited by Robert Silverberg and published by Doubleday in 1970; it was made up of the best sf short

stories. The second volume, consisting of these two huge books, is made up of the best sf novelets and novellas; and a future volume will be made up of the best novels. The contents of each of these volumes was decided by a vote of the Science Fiction Writers of America, an organization of professional sf writers, and nominations of favorite stories went on for over a year. This giant multi-volume project was conceived as a way of honoring those outstanding works of science fiction that were published before the SFWA began giving out its annual achievement awards, or Nebulas, in 1966. There are 22 stories in this anthology, ranging from H.G. Wells's "The Time Machine" (first published in 1895) to Cordwainer Smith's "The Ballad of Lost C'Mell" (1962), and nearly all are from *Astounding* or *Galaxy*.

There are many excellent stories here, as might be imagined. Wells's "The Time Machine," while familiar to nearly all readers, is worth reading again, and will probably be even more enjoyable the second time around—I know I found it so. E.M. Foster's "The Machine Stops," first published in 1928, is one of the earliest anti-utopia stories published, predating both *Brave New World* and 1984. It is a fine story, even though the anti-utopia has become something of a cliché. It is more likely that the future will not be a simplistic black or white, but a complex

muddled grey, a mixture of utopia and anti-utopia.

Jack Vance's "The Moon Moth" is a simple but intriguing story about a planet where the mask one wears reflects the personality of the user—or should. If they fail to match, the person is quickly killed by the native inhabitants. Vance's skill at the creation of alien societies and their customs is revealed in full force in this story. Algis Budrys's "Rogue Moon" is about a strange formation that is discovered on the moon. In order to explore it, conquer it, and delve into its mystery, scientists must first find a man who is able to survive the experience of death and yet not go insane. Some of Budrys's characters hover on the verge of being stereotypes (especially Baker, the man they find who is able to experience death and stay sane), but the story is still so finely written in so many ways that it is a shame that Budrys isn't writing sf anymore. Cordwainer Smith's "The Ballad of Lost C'Mell" is an excellent introduction to Smith's series, *The Lords of Instrumentality*, for any of those readers who have not yet had the pleasure of encountering this work. The story is about the Lord Jestocost, C'Mell, (a cat-derived underperson) and their efforts to help liberate the underpeople. The strong underlying emotion in the story, Smith's simple yet poetic style, the inventive details, all help to make this

one of the best stories in the book—and my own personal favorite.

This second volume of *The Science Fiction Hall of Fame* is not perfect, however; some of the stories have dated badly. Robert Heinlein's "Universe," for instance, has been imitated so often (and what's more, improved upon) that today it seems very clichéd. Heinlein's story is about one of those giant spaceships which take generations to travel between the stars, and whose inhabitants forget they are in a spaceship and think that the spaceship is the entire world. Lester del Rey's "Nerves" has also dated very badly. The story is about an accident at a nuclear power plant, and deals with the problem in what will seem like a very unrealistic way to today's readers. Worse still, perhaps, "Nerves" does not have many other basic story-telling values that might otherwise redeem it.

Other stories have flaws that are not a result of age, but are simply imperfections in the author's treatment of the story. C.M. Kornbluth's "The Marching Morons," for instance, postulates a society where the average IQ is 45 because all the stupid, lower-class people had ten or twelve children, while the high-IQ people had only two or three. However, as David Book pointed out in the *Science in Science Fiction* in the March, 1972 *AMAZING*, this is impossible in the mere 100

years Kornbluth postulates without selective breeding—and perhaps is impossible period. Not only is "intelligence" heavily dependent upon a person's environment and education, as well as hereditary factors, but scientists and psychologists haven't been able to precisely define just what "intelligence" is in the first place. All this makes the social criticism in "The Marching Morons"—which is the whole point of the story, unless you want to count the simplistic "bad guys always get what they deserve" ending—simply irrelevant.

Another story that has some major flaws is Jack Williamson's "With Folded Hands," which is an excerpt from Williamson's novel, *The Humanoids*. This novella suffers from what I call the Chesterfield Syndrome—i.e., although a story is set hundreds of years in the future, on another planet, and a major technical advance is postulated, nearly everything else in the story is exactly the same as it is on present-day Earth, right down to the brand of the hero's cigarettes. Well, Williamson doesn't go that far (mainly, I suspect, because his hero doesn't smoke), but the only new element he introduces into his supposedly far future, extra-terrestrial society is the android, or humanoid. This is neither logical nor consistent of Williamson, and if sf is supposed to be a type of literature that deals with change, then "With Folded

Hands" is a very poor example of it. (I might add that the basic point Williamson makes in his story has been made far more effectively by Kurt Vonnegut in his novel *Player Piano*, published only four years after "With Folded Hands".)

I have probably over-emphasized the bad stories in this book. But it is a shame that these mediocre stories were reprinted here, while much better stories—such as Farmer's "The Lovers," or Ward Moore's, "Bring the Jubilee"—are absent. Certainly the majority of the stories are excellent, but this second volume of *The Science Fiction Hall of Fame* is not the perfect anthology some would lead you to believe.

—Cy Chauvin

Editor's note: Although I disagree with Cy's opinions on several of the stories he mentions, it should be pointed out that presumably these are, in several cases, condensed versions of novels. "The Time Machine," for instance, exists in several versions of varying length, while Budrys' "Rogue Moon" was cut considerably for a magazine appearance (and compares unfavorably with the full-length Fawcett Gold Medal novel). Heinlein's "Universe" is one half of his Orphans of the Sky (Signet), and its value lies in the fact that it was the first story of its kind. Lester del Rey's "Nerves" was originally published more

than twenty-five years ago in Astounding in the version published here; in the mid-fifties it was extensively revised, updated, and expanded into a Ballantine novel of the same name, which remains in print. Of Cy's suggestions for alternatives, Farmer's "The Lovers" certainly should have been included—in its original, 1952 Startling Stories version and not the expanded (and inferior) version published by Ballantine. However Moore's Bring the Jubilee was, even in magazine form, a complete novel and rightly belongs under consideration for the third volume of the Hall of Fame series. (It is also still in print from Ballantine.) —tw

Donald A. Wollheim, editor: *THE 1973 ANNUAL WORLD'S BEST SF*. DAW Books, New York, 1973. 253 pages, paperback (original), 95¢.

This is the second Wollheim-sans-Carr "best of the year" anthology, and although Terry Carr's absence is noticeable to the readers who remember the *World's Best SF 1965-1971*, it is still a fine collection. The introduction is interesting since Wollheim explains the *wheres* and *whys* of how each story was chosen. He gives his own highly personal, but probably correct, opinions about the state of science fiction today; he reviles some of the newer, freakier anthologies and uplifts the material being pub-

lished in the sf magazines. Criterion for selection in Wollheim's "best anthology" is actually two-pronged: a story must have a good plot and contain that old sense of wonder. Not a bad combination when you think about it.

The first story can't be argued against in just about anyone's book—Poul Anderson's "Goat Song," which copped a Nebula at the last banquet. It is probably, as Wollheim states in the blurb, the finest story that Anderson has ever written. If you didn't catch it in the magazine version, this lead-off story will certainly impress.

"The Man Who Walked Home" by James Tiptree, Jr. appeared here in AMAZING last year, and it was just one of many fine Tiptree stories that were published in these pages. However, Wollheim claims that this particular one was selected because of its unique handling of time travel. Actually, the story is good for more reasons than that. Tiptree is a powerful stylist who doesn't get carried away with his language. His scenes are vivid and fresh and he knows how to control his readers' emotions when he gives life to his characters. Another good pick.

Michael G. Coney has been appearing with increasing regularity in both the magazines and the anthologies, and practically every story I've seen by him has all the proper ingredients: plot, imagination, language, and good characterization. His story in this collec-

tion, "Oh, Valinda!" is one of his best ever. He has a knack for creating a believable alien landscape and ecological system, which injects the story with a powerful sense of foreboding. And you are immediately interested in his characters because they are not stereotypes, something that isn't always true in our field. The plot is double-edged, which gives the story an added complexity and dimension which you won't really appreciate until after you've finished it. My only complaint is the relatively poor choice of title—it sounds like an old frontier song.

Frederik Pohl is one of the "Old Hands" that Wollheim affectionately refers to in his introduction and he is represented here by a complex, tongue-in-cheek tale that garnered him lots of Nebula nominations last year. "The Gold At The Starbow's End" is long, fragmented account of a counterfeit voyage to the nearest star, Alpha Centauri. Through a long series of reports and scenes, Pohl unravels a mystery and a revelation about the real intentions and results of the trip. There are vague reminders of Clarke's *Childhood's End* type of philosophy in it, plus some pretty shaky assumptions that you must accept if you want the story to work for you. But if you do swallow the initial premises, the story is a blockbuster and just having it and Anderson's "Goat Song" in the same book make the book a

real bargain.

"To Walk A City's Street" by Clifford Simak is a finely written, deceptive little story about a "Typhoid Mary" type of character who is being kept under surveillance by a Government Agency. There are twists upon twists until the tale reaches a chilling ending, that doesn't really hit you for about five minutes after you've finished it. This was easily the best story from the *Infinity* Series.

The next story, "Rorqual Maru" by T. J. Bass, is a semi-tragic tale about genetic manipulation and over-efficient technology. It's well written but it seems much too long for the obvious and predictable conclusions which are drawn.

"Changing Woman" by W. Macfarlane is just a so-so tale about sympathetic magic and its relationship to natural forces. It's a story that's been done many times before and far better when not done so seriously as this. (Robert Sheckley comes to mind as being a master of this type of story, told with the tongue properly in cheek).

Robert J. Tilley's contribution, "Willie's Blues," is a very good time travel story in the sense that it is written with sensitivity and real emotional control. There are problems however. Number one, the story is linear, and the ending is obvious from the second page (although I must give Tilley credit; he didn't save it until the last line a la the fifties). Number two,

this was done before, switching the artform from jazz to modern art, by William Tenn in his old story, "Morniel Mathaway." Tenn's version is not as serious, more fun, and somehow, just plain more enjoyable.

Vernor Vinge makes this anthology with a fairly typical automated spaceship story called "Long Shot" that gets pretty boring with an almost endless catalogue of technical details (this is hard science fiction taken to the extreme: no characters, no dialogue, just machinery). The ending is something of a surprise, I guess; and it hits you with a little dash of sentiment, but I didn't feel it was one of the "top ten of the year" as the cover blurb proclaimed.

The last story in any anthology should be a good one and Wollheim doesn't let the reader down by placing Phyllis MacLennan's moving tale, "Thus Love Betrays Us," in the wind-up spot. Miss MacLennan takes you to an eerie, chilling world called Dierdre and whips up a visual, sensual atmosphere that seems to creep inside your bones. It is a seemingly simple meeting between human and alien cultures that begins as a friendship and ends in nightmare. Wollheim deserves credit for digging this one out.

In summary, *The 1973 Annual World's Best SF* is a good book and you should buy and read it, even if you've caught most of the better-known stories when they

first appeared. Wollheim's selections seem to be based more on content and idea than on style and mood, more on optimistic viewpoints than on pessimistic ones. He has the courage to stand behind his own ideas of what sf should be, he shows no prejudice to the newer writers, and he makes it all available for less than a dollar. He makes his "World's Best" a tough one to beat.

—Thomas F. Monteleone

Terry Carr, editor: *THE BEST SCIENCE FICTION OF THE YEAR #2*, Ballantine, New York, 1973, 370pp., paperback, \$1.25

Terry Carr and Donald Wollheim used to edit *The World's Best SF* series for Ace Books, generally considered for many years the best of the 'best' collections. Now both Carr and Wollheim have left Ace and started best-of-the-year collections of their own. Carr's is easily the better of the two. He has managed to steer a course between the more conservative, traditional—and I'm afraid occasionally stodgy—tastes of Wollheim, and the experimental and too often mainstream mixture of prose and poetry that turns up in the Harrison-Aldiss *Best SF* (the other longest running best of the year series). Of course, 'best' collections are still no substitute for the actual original publications themselves, no matter how ably edited, since no reader's and editor's tastes will

ever completely agree. I, for instance, cannot understand why Carr failed to include Ursula K. LeGuin's Hugo-winning novella "The Word For The World is Forest" in his collection, or even on his list of Honorable Mentions. But this is still an excellent book.

AMAZING is represented in the anthology with Alexei & Cory Panshin's "Sky Blue" (from our March, 1972 issue). This is basically a fairy tale told in science fictional terms, and while this is not an entirely original concept (Cordwainer Smith did it in "Mark Elf," first published in 1957) it is still an interesting one. One of the factors that detract from the story, however, is its obvious and unsubtle ecological message; the simplistic moralizing found in fairy tales is something not worth adapting into sf, since life is never that simplistic. That's why fairy tales are usually considered childish, not because they contain mythological and unreal elements.

Joanna Russ's "Nobody's Home" (from *New Dimensions II*) is about a Utopian world in which all problems have been solved except that of the "Human Condition." A very strong story; Russ has that rare ability to drop the reader into a strange future world and just let him figure out what is going on, without resorting to explanatory lectures or other artificial devices. She relies instead on realistically-placed dialog and description, and makes the story a

puzzle that the reader has to put together. There are certain rewards gained by doing this, and I don't think Russ makes her stories "difficult" or obscure for their own sake; there is as much reason and logic behind what she makes difficult and obscure in her stories as there is in what she makes easy and clear.

Robert Silverberg is represented by two diverse stories. The first, "Caliban," is perhaps Silverberg's best short work since "Sundance" and "Passengers." It is about a 20th century man resurrected in a world in which everyone is physically alike, beautiful and golden, and he alone is ugly. But the people of this future time adore his ugliness, value his strangeness. The story's ending is not too surprising, but it is logical and good, and brings home Silverberg's point quite well. His second story, "When We Went To See The End of the World," is a much weaker effort. It is centered around a group of boring and status seeking individuals at a party who describe their time-travel trips to see "the end of the world," each of which is different from the other—while, oblivious to them, their own present society is falling apart. If the story was more subtle, contained some real people, and was not so flat and dull, it could easily have been excellent. As it is, I suspect it is something Silverberg thought up at a boring party in which everyone talked about ecological doom and atomic war all night.

It would not be too difficult to fill up a best of the year collection with stories by James Tiptree Jr. and Gordon Eklund alone. Both men are talented and relatively prolific short story writers, at a time when most of their competitors seem to lack one or another of these qualities. "Painwise," by Tiptree, is about a star explorer who can feel no pain, and is lost in the depths of outer space. He finds that this inability to feel pain is not the boon it might seem, but instead makes him an inhuman alien, cut off from one of the common experiences all humans share: pain. And when he finally attains his goal—his humanity, so to speak, restored—it overwhelms him, and he tragically collapses. Which may be Tiptree's way of saying that the human condition is too much to bear, and that we all must be partially aliens (or "alienated" from it) in order to endure it at all. Eklund's story, "Grasshopper Time," is about another kind of alien: a man who cannot die and is persecuted for his differences, and must give up the woman he loves for this reason. Both these stories are not only interesting to read once, but will repay rereading a second or third time—and this can be said of only the best of stories.

Joe W. Haldeman's "Hero" is a solid, meaty novella, and the fact that it was originally published in *Analog* shows how that magazine has improved under Ben Bova's editorship. The story centers around the training a special elite

army undergoes on Earth and in outer space, in order to combat an alien menace, and is written in that guts-and-bolts style so common in stories about the military ("Three weeks of carrying around twice as much weight as normal. . . it's no picnic."). As much as I admire Haldeman's skillful handling of this style, it is as much a cliché as the pseudo-archaisms found in sword & sorcery fiction. "Hero" also suffers from the fact that it is space opera—i.e., the futuristic material in the story is merely an artificial trapping, and not the element out of which the story's theme or plot arises. "Hero" deals with the effect military training has on people, in particular one William Mandella, and this could as easily be expressed in a contemporary story set totally on Earth. Contrast this with the various sf stories which have attempted to deal seriously with the effects of immortality, ecological disaster, changeable sex, and even the threat of alien invasion (the sup-

posed sf theme of "Hero") might have on mankind, and the difference is readily apparent. *These kinds of stories would be impossible to write—or be extremely less effective—if the author had not cast them as sf.* The same cannot be said of "Hero." I don't think this necessarily makes "Hero" a bad story, but I do think it prevents it from being called a great one; and I think it is an important enough point that other writers should keep it in mind when concocting future sf stories.

There are a great many other stories in the book, most excellent, such as Gene Wolfe's novella "The Fifth Head of Cerberus," or at least fair, such as Lafferty's Hugo-winning "Eurema's Dam." As I said, this is the best of the best: the most well-rounded and diverse collection of the year's best sf stories available. You may not enjoy all the stories in this anthology, but each will stimulate a strong reaction in you.

Buy. Read. Enjoy.

—Cy Chauvin

Good Servants (cont. from page 95)

sole and punched some buttons. The music changed. "Jefferson Airplane." It changed again. "Grateful Dead."

"But . . . but I thought you wouldn't be a beatnik again."

The metal face remained impassive but there was a sneer in Eddie's voice. "The days of the beatnik are over; man. This is the time of the freaks."

"The freaks?" Tom envisioned pinheaded dwarves, legless beg-

gars on skateboards.

"The teenie-boppers. The hippies. Here. This will help you understand." Eddie dropped a small white cube in Tom's hand. Tom looked at it, befuddled. "Eat it, man."

Tom lifted it to his mouth. "What is it?"

"A sugar cube, man."

Warily, Tom tasted it. It was sweet.

—GRANT CARRINGTON

Editorial (cont. from page 4)

mantles—these serious people were much offended at the notion of Pong Awards. Indeed, they became so upset that at the Business Meeting of our Worldcon they made it a point to ratify the two new fan awards as Hugos, to sweepingly embrace *all* Achievement Awards, fan and pro, under one name—The Hugo.

Thus we slipped it by them. We inaugurated two new Hugos, Hugos which have been awarded by each Worldcon since. (Our use of both Fan and Pro Guests of Honor—until then rarely done—also became an instant tradition.)

It is of course purely coincidental that an award for which I was primarily responsible should be given this year to someone whom I had only recently asked to take over the *Clubhouse*. My congratulations to Susan—she was clearly deserving of the honor and honors us all by her continued presence here.

It's a bit anticlimactic to remark that in the Best Professional Editor category I once again placed third.

This year the runners-up for awards were not mentioned during the Awards Banquet, and I did not have this information when I passed on the list of winners last month in *FANTASTIC*, but a recent issue of *Locust*, the sf newspaper, did give 2nd and 3rd places for each category. The winner this year, as last, was Ben Bova, editor of *Analog*. Second place this year went to Robert Silverberg, whose editorial talents have been obvious in a variety of anthologies produced over the last few years (and whose recommendation was originally responsible for my present position with these magazines).

It seems to be my fate to place third each year. For the past five years this has occurred each year. For the first three years of eligibility under my editorship, when the award category was Best Professional Magazine, this magazine placed third (1970, 1971, 1972). When the category was changed to Best Professional Editor, I myself placed third (1973, 1974). Next year?

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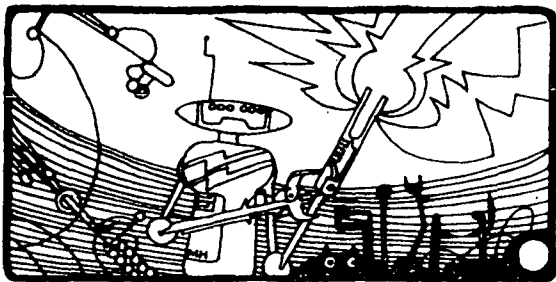
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...OR SO YOU SAY



Letters intended for publication should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of each sheet, and addressed to *Or so You Say*, Box 409, Falls Church, Va., 22046.

My announcement, in our October, 1974, issue that from now on we would consider story submissions from previously unpublished authors only if a 25¢ handling fee was enclosed, sparked reactions both pro and con, as I knew such a controversial policy decision would. Two letters follow, each representative of the viewpoints expressed. —TW

Dear Ted:

This is the first time since I started reading your magazines that I have been completely upset by something within them, namely, the 25¢ "handling charge." It is almost as cruel a blow as Doubleday's slush pile decision of a few months ago. To the aspiring authors (including myself) in the netherland of the unpublished, it is but another bridge that is burnt before it can be crossed.

Unfortunately, I can see the logic behind this decision. For reading many of today's submissions, combat pay would not be too much to ask. It is only just that the readers be reimbursed for their time and effort. But why take it out of our hides? The question is purely rhetorical, since

ours are the only hides left unscathed, basically, by the soaring costs of publishing.

It will be a long time before I have the opportunity of adding one of your rejection slips to my ever growing collection, since I will wait my first publication before trying you, thus saving part of the cost of an additional submission. Until then I will have to content myself with reading your excellent publications.

JOHN M. FURPHY
91 Main Street
Mount Carbon
Pottsville, Pa. 17901

Dear Ted,

The October '74 *AMAZING* hit my mailbox today, and altho I have yet to read the fiction, I wanna put in my 7¢ worth (used to be 2¢ but inflation. . . .) about the "first reader's fee" of a quarter submission, to wit: It's about time! No matter how much love goes into the labor of sifting through the "slush pile" of unsolicited manuscripts, there's a wearing down that must eventually take its toll on the first readers. Personally, I think that a more substantial fee would be more appropriate, but, as a semi-starving unpublished writer myself, I see why a quarter is about as high as you wanna go for fear of deterring some future Heinlein or Asimov from

sending his manuscript to you.

Part of the idea of "professional" is being paid, however nominally, for what you do. It may be a hangup that goes with our free-enterprise system, or it may be a matter of peer pressure from relatives and friends who really can't *understand* how the first reader could do all that work without pay. . . . Anyhoo, if I were one of your first readers, I'd probably be ecstatic to be getting *anything* besides my name on the masthead, so I anticipate that they will continue to forward good stuff to you, so you can put it between the covers of your two mags.

I'm sure that you're gonna get some flak from writers who are sure that their stuff is so good that they need not send a quarter, but that reflects all kinds of psychological motivations that don't belong in the marketplace of ideas. As for me, I'm all too aware of the inflationary realities that force you to take the first reader's fee where it's most available. If and when my *magnum opus* gets finished, and if it looks like your type of material, it will come your way with the quarter enclosed.

RICK KNOBLOCH
Box 131

Fincastle, Virginia 24090

At the Discon this year, several editors came up to me and shook my hand fervently, saying as they did so, "I hope it catches on, Ted," and "You shoulda made it a buck!" I expect that some day my name will be cursed by amateur writers' groups across the nation—but I honestly feel that anyone too stingy to pay two bits to have his manuscript considered is probably not an author whose stories we'd care to consider. The following letter strikes a related note.—TW

Dear Ted,

After reading your mag since day one (i.e. the first issue that you edited), I feel it necessary that I write an LOC, to hopefully correct a grievous error.

Perhaps I should quickly get to the point, before you begin to think that I have a gripe against your mag. Our base library just got in a copy of the 1974 edition of the *Writer's Handbook* edited by A.S. Burack. 819 pages and published by The Writer, Inc., Boston, Mass. At any rate while scanning through the advertised 2,000 markets for manuscript sales (on the dust cover), I came across the section devoted to SF and Fantasy markets (specifically pages 627 & 628). The only ones listed were as follows; *Analog*, *F & SF*, *Galaxy*, *If* and *Weirdbook*. Shocked by the sacrilege that left out such mags as AMAZING, FANTASTIC, *SF Adventure Classics*, and *Thrilling SF*; not to mention *Vertex*, I checked the entire 2,000 listings. Finally found *Vertex* (listed under Popular Fiction, no less), but was unable to find any mention of the others listed above.

My questions are as follows:

1. Are Ultimate (the publisher of all the unlisted mags), and this Burack dude feuding, and he left you out for spite?

2. Is it actually possible that someone who claims to be knowledgeable enough to publish and edit a book of this nature could not have heard of your corporation?

3. Would you please check into it, and let your readers know, why you were left out?

4. Since there was no publisher's address in or near this book, I could not send them a nastygram (would you believe they didn't bother to list themselves?); could you possibly pub-

lish their address, and let a few thousand fans write their opinion of this shoddy treatment?

Any help on the above, would be greatly appreciated.

SSG HARLEY M. BISSELL
BA 322-46-7183
Co C, USASAFS
CMR Box 1709
APO NY 09458

While I appreciate your concern over the omission of our magazines from this market listing, I do not share it. It is my opinion that such listings vastly increase the load of totally unsuitable stories submitted and rarely result in the discovery of new authors or worthwhile stories. Professional authors—at least in our field—rarely use such publications; their appeal is primarily to hopeless amateurs. I would prefer to receive submissions from would-be writers who are at least aware of our magazines firsthand, who come from our own audience. The ratio of good stories from unknown authors is much higher in the latter case. As for your specific questions: 1. I am unaware of any such feud, but it is possible that the omission dates back to the period when this magazine and its companion, FANTASTIC, published mostly reprints. (SF Adventure Classics and Thrilling SF, were always entirely devoted to reprints, and thus never represented a market for new stories. This did not deter some hopeful would-be writers, however; periodically we have received manuscripts addressed to those titles. Such stories, by no coincidence, were uniformly awful.) 2. Sure. 3. No, since I have no desire to be included. 4. Frankly, I'm no more in touch with them than they are with me; I haven't got their address. I think you regard such a

listing as a mark of status; I regard it as a potential annoyance. —TW

Dear Ted,

Comments on the August AMAZING:

Let's start with the features. Your editorial provided an interesting insight on the personality of Ted White. It's good to know that you edit AMAZING and FANTASTIC because it brings you intellectual pleasure and not only for the money. I guess this is what makes your magazines warmer and more personal than most.

Benford's article was a surprise: I thought he had given up his feature. It provides an interesting point of thought, and gives (me, at least) some interesting new facts about Titan and also about the possibility of the development of life. I have only one doubt: in the case of Jovian life, which Benford seems to consider possible, wouldn't the pressure of that atmosphere be an important factor? I wonder if life is possible at such pressures.

Brian Stableford's article was the best feature this time. Brian, with this article, seems to have discovered a whole new world for sf criticism. He has also located it among the media, which seems to be more in conformity with modern theory. The article is very well thought out, and I was forced to agree at least partially with Brian's views. Keep running his articles; it seems like he'll always have something to say.

Now to the fiction. I haven't read the serial yet, since I'm waiting for the conclusion. "Searching the Ruins" was just a little too hermetic for me—I guess Thurston could have expanded this story just a bit, so as to make it say lots more.

"New Route to the Indies" is quite

good. Hell, it's very good. It can be read on various levels, and it has some strange ideas in it. It gave me food for thought, which is basic to almost any story. And wouldn't history teachers love it!

"Manhattan Square Dance" is also a very good story. I guess it would've been quite a stunner in 1964. Ten years later, it was worth the trouble of reviving it. I found that it reflects quite well some of the common situations faced by the thinking person today. It reflected my feelings quite well and I could rather identify with it. Well done.

The cover is very much to my liking; I prefer it to the astronomicals on the last two issues. By the way, the cover on the June issue is credited to another publication. Why not use originals only?

The interior illustrations are quite good, in fact above average. I have mixed feelings on Mike Nally's work, and his illustration kind of left me cold. The Jones illo is quite good: it reflects a lot of the story's mood (even though the man looks more Portuguese than Spanish, and much less Italian). The Richard Olsen illo for your story intrigued me. Its technique is almost photographic (not in hyper-realism, but in the composition). In any case, it is very effective; the whole picture is perfectly balanced, and it fits well in the one-column format, too.

As a whole, this issue was quite satisfactory. There have been better issues, but they are few. As a whole your recent issues have been about level, and this level is quite high. Keep all this work up, Ted. It was your **FANTASTIC** that really got me into sf, and I want to see it always strong and in good health (I guess I'm a romantic at soul). **AMAZING** has de-

served attention lately; I want to continue giving it some.

FERNANDO QUADROS GOUVEA
Largo da Batalha, 92

04031 São Paulo, São Paulo, BRASIL
Life appears to be possible at nearly any pressure. Life exists on our ocean floors, where the pressure is vast. The problem is moving a lifeform used to one pressure into another. Yet, some sea-creatures can adjust to considerable pressure-differences. As for David Hardy's cover, it was a plate from Challenge of the Stars, a book consisting of Hardy's astronomical art with text by Patrick Moore, and published only in Great Britain; in this sense it is a "reprint," but it had never before been used as a cover—for either a book or a magazine—and was offered to us by Hardy expressly for first U.S. cover use.—TW

Dear Mr. White,

Thank you for publishing Brian Stableford's articles. They seem to be the most dynamic efforts in the area of sf criticism being written at the present; and, while I do not completely agree with his thesis, at least I do have something solidly stated to argue *with*. It is infinitely to your credit that you are trying to fill the present demand for sf criticism with articles such as this—criticism not just by an academic onlooker but by a sf writer familiar with both sides of the field.

I don't think that the recent interest scholars have taken in sf is ultimately for the good of the genre. My worst fears were in fact confirmed a book I have recently read, *New Worlds for Old* by David Ketterer. (I haven't been reading **AMAZING** regularly so I don't know if it has been reviewed here.) The book suffered not only from scholarly pretentiousness

(the worst kind) but also from a style that made prolonged concentration almost painful. I was thankful that I had merely borrowed a library copy and not paid \$2.95 for a paperback whose only redeeming quality may be that it will ultimately be shredded into good packing material. *New Worlds for Old* though, is a prime example of Stableford's idea that sf cannot be judged "purely and simply by 'literary standards.'" But on the other hand, one must admit that there is no valid way to judge sf that is completely divorced from literary standards.

On the whole I regard Stableford's efforts as A Good Thing and an important contribution that will, I hope, inspire other vital new voices to enter the field. And to the paper shredder with academic pretentiousness!

R. A. CYRUS
R.R. #1 Whites Cr. Rd.
Prichard, W. Va.

Dear Ted,

I'm sorry that my first letter to you and yours should be one of criticism, because I usually enjoy both AMAZING and FANTASTIC, but I'm afraid the particularly low calibre of the October issue has finally prompted me to write. I had a suspicion I was not getting my money's worth when I first looked at the contents page; I am wary of magazines which pad their pages with contributions from their staff. *Vertex* does this all too often; the staff fiction almost always sounds as if the editor called together his subordinates and said, "Ok, gang, we need ten thousand words for the next ish, because we only got four submissions this month and the publisher refuses to put any of them into print on moral grounds."

In the case of your October issue,

this was only too true. Now before you jump on my back, let me say that I know that neither Jeff Jones nor Brian Stableford are "staff." But Jones is one of your regular illustrators and Stableford, not primarily known for his short fiction, is a regular contributor to your pages with non-fiction. These three short stories, I thought, met only the lowest standards of professionalism and, in the case of the Jones story, not even those. Even if these stories weren't by your associates, I would have commented on their poor quality, so I am not complaining merely because of a personal prejudice of mine. And it's not that I don't like the author's works generally, either. Stableford's novels have always impressed me. I liked Carrington's "Anapolis Town." It's just that I got the impression that the long-predicted failure of AMAZING was suddenly upon us, that the magazine was at such a low point that you had to resort to desperation tactics to fill the 132 pages.

Now for the good news. (Nothing is *all* bad). Your longer fiction has always been, to me, your forte; such recent appearances as Dann's "Junction" and Sargent's "Father" have afforded me much reading pleasure. Novels serialized in AMAZING and FANTASTIC see hard covers with greater frequency than those featured by your competitors. Vance's "The Domains of Koryphon" is no exception. Let's see more of this author and this series.

Your features are also a highpoint in any issue; it's a pity the editorial in the October issue was so short, though I welcome the return of *The Clubhouse* and realize that you can't fit everything into one issue. "Requiem for Apollo" was satisfactory (if nothing more), but not worth the exc-

lusion of *The Future in Books*.

I shall not close without a constructive suggestion to attempt a balance with my criticism. I recently found the November 1972 issue of AMAZING in the public library, and since I only started reading the magazine last year, this one was new to me. I must say that it was one of the best single issues of any sf publication I have read. The format especially appealed to me: a serial installment, a novelet (not a novella, as you exaggerated on the contents page, but a piece of long fiction all the same), another, slightly shorter novelet and a solid not-too-short story. Emphasis, you notice, is placed on longer fiction. The stories themselves were brilliant—particularly James Tiptree's superb novelet (where has he gone?). The shorter works also showed a depth and thoughtfulness which I have found lacking in your magazines of late. This format, I think, would benefit AMAZING especially, eliminating the multitude of generally mediocre vignette-size stories which have been cluttering up your pages and filling in the gaps between the longer pieces. The closest you have come to this ideal in recent months was in the July 1974 FANTASTIC, a quite satisfying issue.

Certainly these magazines have improved since you took the helm, but I have found recently a downward trend in overall quality. Financial problems, no doubt, have a hand in this and I hope that your recent measures will improve the situation without dropping their circulation. The sf magazines are all, with the exception of *Analog*, all in hot water. With the imminent demise of *IF* (I am told that the December, 1974 issue will be the last), we cannot afford to lose two more.

PETER C. MANDLER
1406 La Jolla Knoll
La Jolla, CA 92037

I'm afraid you've jumped to the wrong conclusions. To begin with, I have never "padded out" an issue with "staff contributions," nor have I ever been required to consider such a move by any lack of "other" contributions. I would guess that my inventory, at the time I put together the October issue, was large enough to publish at least a half-year's worth of issues of this magazine, and a year's worth of FANTASTIC. I consider the stories I buy purely on their own merits and not by the names of their authors, and I assemble an issue in order to provide a good balance in theme and content between the stories. That the three short stories in the October issue all "met only the lowest standards of professionalism" is your opinion and not mine; I dispute it. Inasmuch as your "suspicions" began before you read these stories, I suspect your unfounded prejudices blinded you to each story's considerable virtues. In any case, Stableford is not "a regular contributor" to these pages "with non-fiction." He had, at the time of the October issue, appeared once each in AMAZING and FANTASTIC, with thought-provoking articles I found it a pleasure to publish. I look forward to publishing more of both his fiction and his non-fiction, and would like indeed to make him a "regular contributor" here, but you've definitely jumped the gun in his case: Jones' story was one I dreaded to read when it arrived—knowing as I do how often good artists are bad writers—but which quite surprised me with its strength, power and precision and it pleased me to buy and to publish it, something I would have done had Jeff never

drawn a line for us. In Grant Carrington's case, you're right: he was indeed "an associate" of ours—and thus subjected to stronger criticism than a non-associate. I felt that "Stella Blue" was if anything more powerful and better realized than "Annapolis Town," and justified my publishing that earlier story (I told Grant when I read "Stella Blue" that if he didn't let me publish it I'd never speak to him again). In any case, each of these three stories had been in inventory for a while and the October issue seemed the proper place for them; no "desperation tactics" were required or used to fill its pages. It is hard for me to understand the difference you found between our October, 1974, issue and our November, 1972, issue, since in each case we ran the second instalment of a serial and three shorter stories. The major difference would be in the fact that Gregory Benford's "Jupiter Project" was shorter than Jack Vance's "The Domains of Koryphon," thus allowing the use of longer stories in the November, 1972, issue. Other differences boil down to matters of taste, on which I will not argue. —TW

Dear Ted,

In the October *Clubhouse*, Susan Wood raises an interesting point—"I don't know who's going to read it [her column]".

Well for one, I am.

I've been buying AMAZING and FANTASTIC regularly since you became editor. At that time I also bought most of the other SF magazines. But now, except for a rare issue of another zine with a lot of stories which look good, AMAZING and FANTASTIC are the only two zines I buy.

But in the last year or so, I doubt

that I've read more than five stories you have published. Yet I still buy the two zines.

The reason is the features—especially the more fannish oriented ones like the *Clubhouse*, the lettercolumns, and most of your editorials.

I have limited contacts with fandom—attending one or two regional cons a year, getting a few fanzines, and attending a few meetings of the Cincinnati Fantasy Group when I'm home in the summer. Still, I am interested in fandom, but haven't been able to make time for more active participation. For that reason, I look to AMAZING and FANTASTIC to help keep me informed as to what's going on in some fannish circles.

One of these days, when I have a little more time, I'll go back and read the stories I missed. But to me they are secondary to the features. And as long as you continue to use such writers as John D. Berry, Ed Smith and Ms. Wood to report on fannish happenings, as long as your editorials remain thoughtprovoking, and as long as the letter columns keep some degree of intelligence and sanity, I'll continue to buy your two magazines, and I'll enjoy the fiction when I get around to it.

JOEL D. ZAKEM

318 Transylvania Park

Apartment 4

Lexington, Ky. 40508

Dear Ted White:

Although you answered Rob Carson's prejudices fairly well in AMAZING (Aug 74) you introduced a few of your own of which I will attempt to take you to task (and thus reveal some of mine), fair enough? Here is your statement:

"... I regard the desire for large families as dangerously anti-human."

That is the viewpoint of many of the population control groups, of course, as well as a great many Americans and others, but I do not consider large families as 'dangerously anti-human', for a number of rational (I hope) reasons:

1. *Historically*, large families have been important to the continued survival of the human race, because of high death rates due to disease, famine, etc.

2. *Psychologically*, large families are conducive to better mental health; that is, members of large families are, as individuals, less likely to require mental therapy, institutionalization, etc.

3. *Racially*, large families have been important as in the USA where blacks have the highest birthrates and highest deathrates of the young; although some persons have protested against high birth rates for blacks, the facts seem to be that the *percentage* of blacks has not changed much from George Washington's day.

4. *Economically*, large families can be useful as in India with agrarian society structures; a child can be useful from the age of 4 or 5.

Please don't consider that I have, above, given anything like a complete discussion of the topics. Instead, let me recommend to you *The Myth of Population Control: Family and Caste in an Indian Village* by Mahmood Mamdani, Monthly Review Press, 116 West 14th St., NYC 10011. \$7.95.

The solution to human problems is not a simple "let's limit population"; but involves rational thinking along many fronts. In the US, for example, children are strictly a luxury item: you get no material benefit from having a child except the love and affec-

tion (if you're lucky!); they are a continual drain on your time, resources, and tolerance (I love my two sons very much, but stick to these statements!). Children also represent a carrying-on, a moving-forward, a link of the chain of life that began millions of years ago. Having children, then, is an affirmation of life and what we would like to think of as human.

Now, please don't get the idea that I'm advocating six kids in every family or anything of the sort; I definitely am not. The US has, lately, dropped the birth rate to 1.9 per couple meaning that, about 2014 (or sooner maybe) population will decline. This will have unfortunate results for many persons; elementary school teachers are feeling it already.

Overpopulation is a serious problem in many parts of the world and I wish I could just say to those most responsible for it that they must just stop immediately or Actions Will Be Taken. Unfortunately, I don't have enough of the Righteous Rigor in me to tell a lot of people that they must die (or not be born) so that I can enjoy the quality of life that I consider appropriate. Do you, Ted White?

There is, by the way, a little ray of hope in UN birth records. Birthrates decline as industrialization (away from the agrarian subsistence level) and per capita income increase. The problem with this solution is that things will at first get much, much worse before they get better. Anyway, I can't agree with you that the desire for big families is anti-human—on the contrary it is all too human.

DAVID V. JENRETTE
Box 374 - Grove
Miami, FL 33133

It's good to hear from you again after all these years, Dave—I remember you

as a fellow fan in the 1950's—and much of what you've said makes sense. But I have the feeling neither of us has all the answers and that yours amount to a Counsel of Complacency. When I speak of overpopulation, I am thinking on a world basis. You refer several times to India and the usefulness of children in agrarian societies, but India also has some of the most overpopulated cities in the world, among which Calcutta is infamous. Nor can India feed her people; she depends upon massive relief from industrialized nations like ours. The present crop failures and shortages here are having disastrous impact on not only India, but more sanely-managed countries like Japan (where zero population growth is already a fact) which depended upon us for 50% of its soybeans, a staple food. As time progresses, things will get worse indeed before they get better—the traditional “cure” for overpopulation is plagues and starvation, and this is already wide spread in Africa and the Near East. Can you regard these events with equanimity? I cannot. I ask no one to die “so that I can enjoy the quality of life that I consider appropriate.” I do ask everyone to stop wantonly spawning babies so that all of us can cling to some aspect of civilized life on this planet. (And I refuse to feel pity for the “elementary school teachers” feeling the pinch of fewer children here; perhaps we can return to classes of reasonable size—fifteen or so kids per class, instead of thirty or forty, as is all too common still—and the quality of individual education can be improved.) I don't feel much hope for the eventual total

industrialization of the world as a way of licking overpopulation. That in itself holds too many other dangers for us. Finally, I'm all too aware of the propensity of human beings to take the short view, leaving long-range problems for other generations to deal with. “Human,” but, unfortunately, also anti-human: it has placed us in our present bind and promises little or no relief in times to come: (But we stf people look ahead—and still we hope . . .)—TW

Dear Ted:

The paperback edition of *Billion Year Spree—The True History of Science Fiction* by Brian W. Aldiss has just come out, and I would like to comment about why this book should not be considered a definitive monograph on the subject. Despite the many merits of the tome, Mr. Aldiss describes Lovecraft as a ghastly writer, terms Clark Ashton Smith unreadable, and calls Arthur C. Clarke egotistical.

However, this is inconsequential. What I find incredible is that Mr. Aldiss could write a book on S.F. and totally omit Stanley G. Weinbaum. Weinbaum originated the idea that alien beings should have their own reasons for existing. Stories like “The Lotus Eaters” and “A Martian Odyssey” are science-fiction classics, and I think are important enough to be mentioned in *The True History of Science Fiction*.

T. L. JONES
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Minneapolis, Minn.
55436

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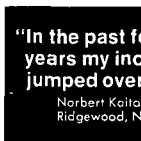
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